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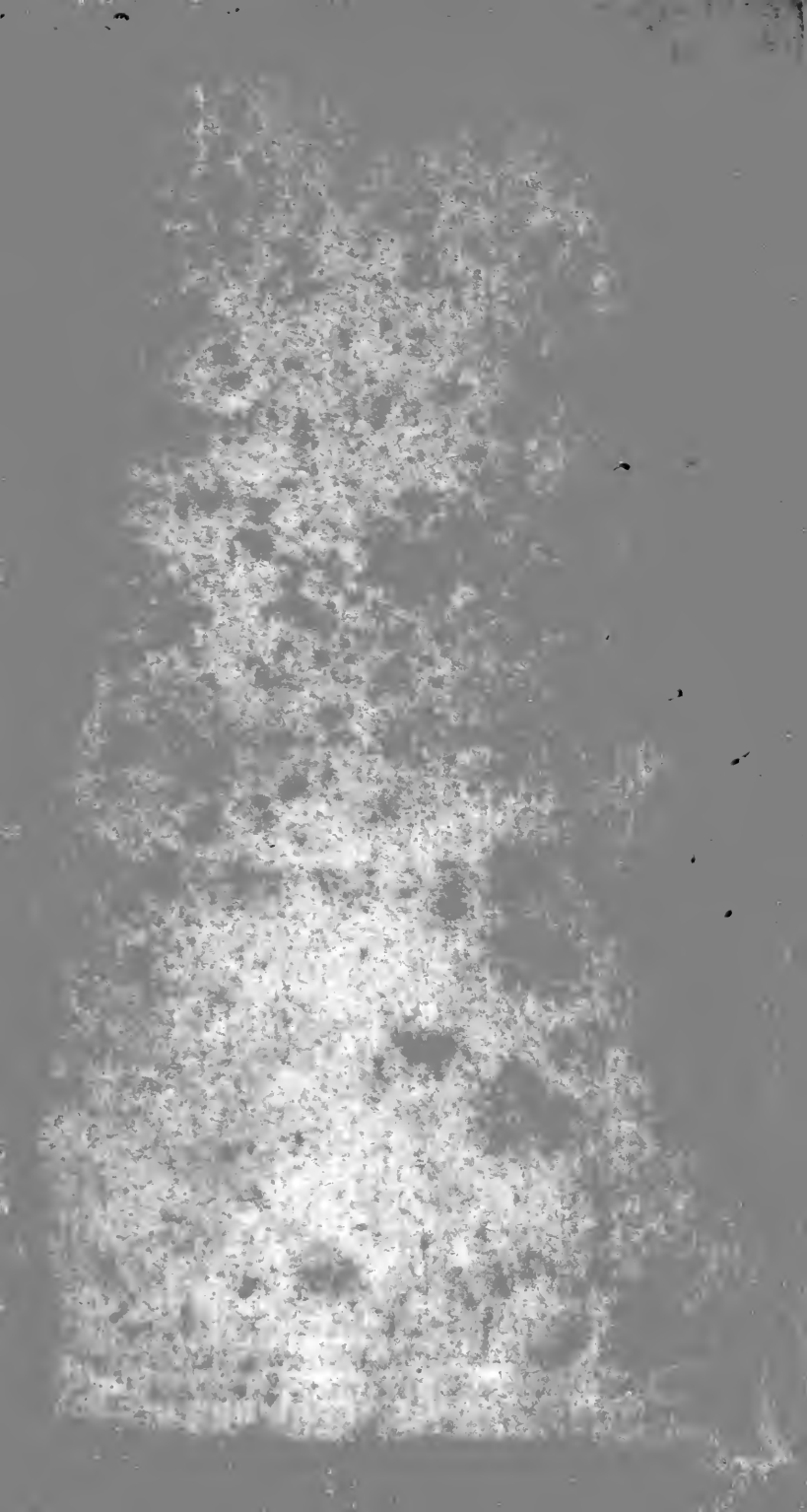


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T H E

W O R K S

Of the MOST REVEREND

Dr. *JOHN TILLOTSON,*

Late Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury:*

I N T E N V O L U M E S.

V O L. I.

*E D I N B U R G H:*

Printed for A. KINCAID and J. BELL, W. SANDS,  
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ADAMS

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T H E

P R E F A C E.

I Shall neither trouble the reader, nor myself, with any apology for the publishing of these sermons. For if they be in any measure truly serviceable to the end for which they are designed, to establish men in the principles of religion, and to recommend to them the practice of it with any considerable advantage, I do not see what apology is necessary; and if they be not so, I am sure none can be sufficient. However, if there need any, the common heads of excuse in these cases are very well known; and I hope I have an equal right to them with other men.

I shall chuse rather in this preface to give a short account of the following discourses; and, as briefly as I can, to vindicate a single passage in the first of them, from the exceptions of a gentleman, who hath been pleased to honour it so far, as to write a whole book against it.

The design of these discourses is fourfold.

1. To shew the unreasonableness of Atheism, and of scoffing at religion; which I am sorry is so necessary to be done in this age. This I have endeavoured in the two first of these discourses.

2. To recommend religion to men from the great and manifold advantages which it brings both to public society and to particular persons. And this is the argument of the third and fourth.

3. To represent the excellency, more particularly, of the Christian religion; and to vindicate the practice of it from the suspicion of those grievous troubles and difficulties which many imagine it to be attended withal. And this is the subject of the fifth and sixth.

4. To persuade men to the practice of this holy religion, from the great obligation which the profession of Christianity lays upon men to that purpose, and, more particularly, from the glorious rewards of another life; which is the design of the two next discourses.

Having given this short account of the following discourses, I crave leave of the reader to detain him a little longer,

whilst I vindicate a passage in the first of these sermons from the assaults of a whole book purposely writ against it. The title of the book is, Faith vindicated from the possibility of Falsehood. The author, Mr. J. S. the famous author of Sure footing. He hath indeed, in this last book of his, to my great amazement, quitted that glorious title. Not that I dare assume to myself to have put him out of conceit with it, by having convinced him of the fantasticalness of it. No; I despair to convince that man of any thing, who, after so fair an admonition, does still persist to maintain, (Letter of Thanks, p. 24, &c.), that first and self-evident principles not only may, but are fit to be demonstrated; and (ibid. p. 11.) that those ridiculous identical propositions, That faith is faith, and A rule is a rule, are first principles in this controversy of the rule of faith, without which nothing "can be solidly concluded, either about rule or faith." But there was another reason for his quitting of that title; and a prudent one indeed! He had forsaken the defence of Sure footing, and then it became convenient to lay aside that title, for fear of putting people any more in mind of that book.

I expected indeed, after his Letter of thanks, in which he tells us, p. 14. he "intended to throw aside the rubbish of my book, that in his answer he might the better lay open the fabric of my discourse, and have nothing there to do, but to speak to solid points;" I say, after this, I expected a full answer to the solid points (as he is pleased to call them) of my book; and that (according to his excellent method of removing the rubbish, in order to the pulling down of a building) the fabric of my book would long since have been demolished, and laid even with the ground. But especially when, in the conclusion of that most civil and obliging letter, he threatened "never to leave following on his blow till he had either brought Dr. Still. and me to lay principles that would bear the test, or it was made evident to all the world that we had none," I began, as I had reason, to be in a terrible fear of him, and to look upon myself as a dead man. And indeed who can think himself so considerable, as not to dread this mighty man of demonstration, this prince of controvertists, this great lord and professor of first principles? But I perceive, that great minds are merciful, and do sometimes content themselves to threaten, when they could destroy.

For, instead of returning a full answer to my book, he, according

ording to their new mode of confuting books, manfully falls a-nibbling at one single passage in it, p. 118. [vol. 3. p. 308, 9. of this edition]; wherein he makes me to say, (for I say no such thing), that "the rule of Christian faith, and consequently faith itself, is possible to be false." Nay in his Letter of thanks, p. 13. he says, "it is an avowed position," in that place, "that faith is possible to be false." And to give the more countenance to this calumny, he chargeth the same position (in equivalent terms) of the possible falshood of faith, and that as to the chiefest and most fundamental point, the tenet of a Deity, upon the fore-mentioned sermon. But because he knew in his conscience, that I had avowed no such position, he durst not cite the words either of my book or sermon, lest the reader should have discovered the notorious falshood and groundlessness of this calumny: nay, he durst not so much as refer to any particular place in my sermon, where such a passage might be found. And yet this is the man that has the face to charge others with false citations; to which charge, before I have done, I shall say something, which, what effect soever it may have upon him, would make any other man sufficiently ashamed.

But yet I must acknowledge, that in this position which he fastens upon me, he honours me with excellent company, my Lord Faulkland, Mr. Chillingworth, and Dr. Stillingfleet; persons of that admirable strength and clearness in their writings, that Mr. S. when he reflects upon his own style, and way of reasoning, may blush to acknowledge that ever he has read them. And as to this position which he charges them withal, I do not know (nor have I the least reason upon Mr. S.'s word to believe) any such thing is maintained by them.

As for myself, whom I am now only concerned to vindicate, I shall set down the two passages, to which I suppose he refers.

In my sermon, [vol. 1. p. 32.] I endeavour, among other things, to shew the unreasonableness of Atheism upon this account: "Because it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of." To make this good, I discourse thus: "Aristotle hath long since observed, how unreasonable it is to expect the same kind of proof for every thing, which we have for some things. Mathematical things, being of an abstracted nature, are only capable of clear demonstration. But conclusions in natural philosophy are to be proved by a sufficient induction of experiments; things of a moral na-

" ture, by moral arguments; and matters of fact, by credible testimony. And tho' none of these be strict demonstration, yet have we an undoubted assurance of them, when they are proved by the best arguments that the nature and quality of the thing will bear. None can demonstrate to me, that there is such an island in America as Jamaica; yet, upon the testimony of credible persons, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as from doubting of the clearest mathematical demonstration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle, by all those who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, That when any thing is proved by as good arguments as that thing is capable of, and we have as great assurance that it is, as we could possibly have supposing it were, we ought not in reason to make any doubt of the existence of that thing. Now to apply this to the present case: The being of God is not mathematically demonstrable; nor can it be expected it should; because only mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be proved immediately by sense; because God being supposed to be a pure spirit, cannot be the object of any corporeal sense. But yet we have as great assurance that there is a God, as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of, and as we could in reason expect to have, supposing that he were."

Upon this passage it must be, if any thing in the sermon, that Mr. S. chargeth this position (in equivalent terms) of the possible falshood of faith, and that as to the chiefest and most fundamental point, the tenet of a Deity. And now I appeal to the readers eyes and judgment, whether the sum of what I have said be not this, That tho' the existence of God be not capable of that strict kind of demonstration which mathematical matters are; yet that we have an undoubted assurance of it. One would think, that no man could be so ridiculous, as from hence to infer, that I believe it possible, notwithstanding this assurance, that there should be no God. For however in many other cases an undoubted assurance that a thing is, may not exclude all suspicion of a possibility of its being otherwise; yet in this tenet of a Deity it most certainly does: because, whoever is assured that there is a God, is assured that there is a being whose existence is and always was necessary; and consequently is assured that it is impossible he should not be, and involves in it a contradiction.

tion. So that my discourse is so far from being equivalent to the position he mentions, that it is a perfect contradiction to it. And he might with as much truth have affirmed, that I had expressly, and in so many words, said, that there is no God.

The other passage is in p. 118. [i. e. vol. 3. p. 308. 309.] of my book, concerning the rule of faith. I was discoursing, that no man can "show, by any necessary argument, that it is naturally impossible that all the relations concerning America should be false. But yet (say I) I suppose that, notwithstanding this, no man in his wits is now possessed with so incredible a folly, as to doubt whether there be such a place. The case is the very same as to the certainty of an ancient book, and of the sense of plain expressions. We have no demonstration for these things, and we expect none; because we know the things are not capable of it. We are not infallibly certain, that any book is so ancient as it pretends to be; or that it was written by him whose name it bears; or that this is the sense of such and such passages in it. It is possible all this may be otherwise: but we are very well assured that it is not; nor hath any prudent man any just cause to make the least doubt of it. For a bare possibility that a thing may be, or not be, is no just cause of doubting whether a thing be or not. It is possible all the people in France may die this night; but I hope the possibility of this doth not incline any man in the least to think that it will be so. It is possible that the sun may not rise to-morrow morning; yet, for all this, I suppose that no man hath the least doubt but that it will."

To avoid the cavils of this impertinent man, I have transcribed the whole page to which he refers. And now, where is this avowed position of the possible falshood of faith? All that I say is this, That we are not infallible either in judging of the antiquity of a book, or of the sense of it: by which I mean, (as any man of sense and ingenuity would easily perceive I do), that we cannot demonstrate these things so as to show that the contrary necessarily involves a contradiction; but yet that we may have a firm assurance concerning these matters, so as not to make the least doubt of them.

And is this to avow the possible falshood of faith? and yet this position Mr. S. charges upon these words; how justly, I shall now examine.

Either by faith Mr. S. means the doctrine revealed by God;

and then the meaning of the position must be, That what God says is possible to be false; which is so absurd a position, as can hardly enter into any man's mind; and yet Mr. S. hath the modesty all along in his book to insinuate, that in the forecited passage I say as much as this comes to.

Or else Mr. S. means by faith, the assent which we give to doctrines as revealed by God; and then his sense of infallibility must be, either, that whoever assents to any thing as revealed by God, cannot be deceived, upon supposition that it is so revealed; or else absolutely, that whoever assents to any thing as revealed by God, cannot be deceived. Now, altho' I do not, in the passage forecited, speak one syllable concerning doctrines revealed by God; yet I affirm, (and so will any man else), that an assent to any doctrine as revealed by God, if it be revealed by him, is impossible to be false. But this is only an infallibility upon supposition; which amounts to no more than this, That if a thing be true, it is impossible to be false. And yet the principal design of Mr. S.'s book is to prove this, which I believe no man in the world was ever so senseless as to deny. But if he mean absolutely, that whoever assents to any doctrine as revealed by God, cannot be deceived; that is, that no man can be mistaken about matters of faith, (as he must mean, if he pretend to have any adversary, and do not fight only with his own shadow): this, I confess, is a very comfortable assertion, but I am much afraid it is not true.

Or else, lastly, by faith he understands the means and motives of faith; and then the plain state of the controversy between us is this, Whether it be necessary to a Christian belief, to be infallibly secured of the means whereby the Christian doctrine is conveyed to us, and of the firmness of the motives upon which our belief of it is grounded? This indeed is something to the purpose: for tho', in the passage before cited, I say not one word concerning the motives of our belief of the Christian doctrine; yet my discourse there was intended to be applied to the means whereby the knowledge of this doctrine is conveyed to us. However, I am contented to join issue with Mr. S. upon both these points.

1. That it is not necessary to the true nature of faith, that the motives upon which any man believes the Christian doctrine should be absolutely conclusive, and impossible to be false. That it is necessary, Mr. S. several times affirms  
in



in his book; but how unreasonably, appears from certain and daily experience. Very many Christians, such as St. Austin speaks of, "as saved, not by the quickness of their understandings, but the simplicity of their belief;" do believe the Christian doctrine upon incompetent grounds; and their belief is true, tho' the argument upon which they ground it be not (as Mr. S. says) "absolutely conclusive of the thing:" and he that thus believes the Christian doctrine, if he adhere to it, and live accordingly, shall undoubtedly be saved; and yet I hope Mr. S. will not say, that any man shall be saved without true faith. I might add, that in this assertion Mr. S. is plainly contradicted by those of his own church.

For they generally grant, that general councils, though they be infallible in their definitions and conclusions, yet are not always so in their arguments and reasonings about them. And the Guide of controversies expressly says, p. 35. that "it is not necessary that a divine faith should always have an external rationally infallible ground or motive thereto (whether church-authority or any other) on his part that so believes." Here is a man of their own church avowing this position, That faith is possible to be false. I desire Mr. S. who is the very rule of controversy, to do justice upon this false Guide.

I must acknowledge, that Mr. S. attempts to prove this assertion, and that by a very pleasant and surprising argument; which is this. "The profound mysteries of faith (he tells us, Faith vind. p. 90.) must needs seem to some (viz. those who have no light but their pure natural reason, as he said before, p. 89.) impossible to be true; which therefore nothing but a motive of its own nature seemingly impossible to be false, can conquer, so as to make them conceit them really true." What Mr. S. here means by a motive of its own nature seeming impossible to be false, I cannot divine; unless he means a real seeming impossibility. But be that as it will, does Mr. S. in good earnest believe, that a motive of its own nature seeming impossible to be false, is sufficient to convince any man, that has and uses the light of natural reason, of the truth of a thing which must needs seem to him impossible to be true? In my opinion, these two seeming impossibilities are so equally matched, that it must needs

be a drawn battle between them. Suppose the thing to be believed be transubstantiation; this indeed is a very profound mystery, and is (to speak in Mr. S.'s phrase) of its own nature so seemingly impossible, that I know no argument in the world strong enough to cope with it. And I challenge Mr. S. to instance in any motive of faith which is, both to our understandings and our senses, more plainly impossible to be false, than their doctrine of transubstantiation is evidently impossible to be true. And if he cannot, how can he reasonably expect that any man in the world should believe it?

2. That it is not necessary to the true nature of faith, that we should be infallibly secured of the means whereby the Christian doctrine is conveyed to us; particularly of the antiquity and authority of the books of scripture, and that the expressions in it cannot possibly bear any other sense. And these are the very things I instance in, in the passage so often mentioned. And to these Mr. S. ought to have spoken, if he intended to have confuted that passage. But he was resolved not to speak distinctly, knowing his best play to be in the dark, and that all his safety lay in the confusion and obscurity of his talk.

Now, that to have an infallible security in these particulars is not necessary to the true nature of faith, is evident upon these two accounts; because faith may be without this infallible security; and because, in the particulars mentioned, it is impossible to be had.

1. Because faith may be without this infallible security. He that is so assured of the antiquity and authority of the books of scripture, and of the sense of those texts wherein the doctrines of Christianity are plainly delivered, as to see no just cause to doubt thereof, may really assent to those doctrines, tho' he have no infallible security. And an assent so grounded I affirm to have the true nature of faith. For what degree of assent, and what security of the means which convey to us the knowledge of Christianity, are necessary to the true nature of faith, is to be estimated from the end of faith, which is, the salvation of mens souls. And whoever is so assured of the authority and sense of scripture, as to believe the doctrine of it, and to live accordingly, shall be saved. And surely such a belief as will save a man, hath the true nature of faith; tho' it be not

*infallible. And if God have sufficiently provided for the salvation of men of all capacities, it is no such reflection upon the goodness and wisdom of providence as Mr. S. imagines, that he hath not taken care that every man's faith should arrive to the degree of infallibility, nor does our blessed Saviour, for not having made this provision, deserve "to be esteemed by all the world, not a wise law-giver, but a mere ignoramus and impostor," as one of his fellow controvertists (Labyrinthus Cantuariensis, p. 77.) speaks with reverence.*

*Besides, this assertion, That infallibility is necessary to the true nature of that assent which we call faith, is plainly false upon another account also; because faith admits of degrees, but infallibility has none. The scripture speaks of a weak and a strong faith, and of the increase of faith; but I never heard of a weak and strong infallibility. Infallibility is the highest perfection of the knowing faculty, and consequently the firmest degree of assent, upon the firmest grounds, and which are known to be so. But will Mr. S. say that the highest degree of assent admits of degrees and is capable of increase? Infallibility is an absolute impossibility of being deceived. Now, I desire Mr. S. to shew me the degrees of absolute impossibility; and if he could do that, and consequently there might be degrees of infallibility, yet I cannot believe that Mr. S. would think fit to call any degree of infallibility a weak faith or assent.*

*2. Because an infallible security in the particulars mentioned, is impossible to be had; I mean in an ordinary way, and without miracle and particular revelation; because the nature of the thing is incapable of it. The utmost security we have of the antiquity of any book, is human testimony; and all human testimony is fallible, for this plain reason, because all men are fallible. And tho' Mr. S. in defence of his beloved tradition, is pleased to say, that human testimony in some cases is infallible; yet I think no man before him was ever so hardy, as to maintain, that the testimony of fallible men is infallible. I grant it to be in many cases certain, that is, such as a considerate man may prudently rely and proceed upon, and hath no just cause to doubt of; and such as none but an obstinate man or a fool can deny. And that thus the*  
*learned*

learned men of his own church define certainty, Mr. S. (if he would but vouchsafe to read such books) might have learned from Melchior Canus\*; who, speaking of the firmness of human testimony in some cases, (which yet he did not believe to be infallible) defines it thus: "Those things are certain among men, which cannot be denied without obstinacy and folly." I know Mr. S. is pleased to say, that certainty and infallibility are all one; and he is the first man that I know of, that ever said it. And yet perhaps some body may have been before him in it; for I remember Tully says, that "there is nothing so foolish, but some philosopher or other has said it." I am sure Mr. S.'s own philosopher, Mr. White, contradicts him in this most clearly, in his preface to Rushworth's dialogues; where, explicating the term moral certainty, he tells us, that, "some understood it by such a certainty as makes the cause always work the same effect, though it take not away the absolute possibility of working otherwise:" and this, presently after he tells us, "ought absolutely to be reckoned in the degrees of true certainty, and the authors considered as mistaken in undervaluing it." So that, according to Mr. White, true certainty may consist with a possibility of the contrary; and consequently Mr. S. is mistaken, in thinking certainty and infallibility to be all one. Nay, I do not find any two of them agreeing among themselves about the notions of infallibility and certainty. Mr. White says, that what some call moral certainty, is true certainty, though it do not take away a possibility of the contrary. Mr. S. asserts the direct contrary, that moral certainty is only probability, because it does not take away the possibility of the contrary. The Guide in controversies, p. 135. differs from them both, and makes moral, certain, and infallible, all one. I desire that they would agree these matters among themselves, before they quarrel with us about them.

In brief, then, tho' moral certainty be sometimes taken for a high degree of probability, which can only produce a doubtful assent, yet it is also frequently used for a firm and undoubted assent to a thing upon such grounds as are fit fully to satisfy a prudent man; and in this sense I have

\* De loc. theol. lib. 11. c. 4. Certa apud homines ea sunt, quæ negare sine perversa & stultitia non possunt.

have always used this term. But now infallibility is an absolute security of the understanding, from all possibility of mistake in what it believes. And there are but two ways for the understanding to be thus secured; either by the perfection of its own nature, or by supernatural assistance. But no human understanding being absolutely secured from possibility of mistake, by the perfection of its own nature, (which I think all mankind except Mr. S. have hitherto granted) it follows, that no man can be infallible in any thing, but by supernatural assistance. Nor did ever the church of Rome pretend to infallibility upon any other account, as every one knows that hath been conversant in the writings of their learned men. And Mr. Cressy, in his answer to Dr. Pierce, p. 88. 89. hath not the face to contend for any other infallibility but this, that "the immutable God" can actually "preserve a mutable creature from actual mutation." But I can by no means agree with him in what immediately follows, concerning the omniscience of a creature; "that God, who is absolutely omniscient, can teach a rational creature all truths necessary or expedient to be known; so that tho' a man may have much ignorance, yet he may be in a sort omniscient within a determinate sphere." Omniscient within a determinate sphere, is an infinite within a finite sphere; and is not that a very pretty sort of knowing all things, which may consist with an ignorance of many things? Of all the controvertists I have met with, except Mr. S. Mr. Cressy is the happiest at these smart and ingenious kind of reasonings.

As to the other particular, of the sense of books, it is likewise plainly impossible that any thing should be delivered in such clear and certain words as are absolutely incapable of any other sense; and yet, notwithstanding this, the meaning of them may be so plain, as that any unprejudiced and unreasonable man may certainly understand them. How many definitions and axioms, &c. are there in Euclid, in the sense of which men are universally agreed, and think themselves undoubtedly certain of it? and yet the words in which they are expressed, may possibly bear another sense. The same may be said concerning the doctrines and precepts of the holy scriptures; and

one great reason why men do not so generally agree in the sense of these as of the other, is, because the interests, and lusts, and passions of men are more concerned in the one than the other. But whatever uncertainty there may be in the sense of any text of scripture, oral tradition so far from affording us any help in this case, that it is a thousand times more uncertain, and less to be trusted to; especially if we may take that to be the traditional sense of texts of scripture, which we meet with in the decretals of their Popes, and the acts of some of their councils; than which never was any thing in the whole world more absurd and ridiculous; and whence may we expect to have the infallible traditional sense of scripture, if not from the heads and representatives of their church?

This may abundantly suffice for the vindication of that passage which Mr. S. makes such a rude clamour about, as if I had therein denied the truth and certainty of all religion; but durst never trust the reader with a view of those words of mine upon which he pretended to ground this calumny. But the world understands well enough, that all this was but a shift of Mr. S.'s, for the satisfaction of his own party, and a pitiful art to avoid the vindication of Sure footing, a task he had no mind to undertake.

And yet the main design of this book, which he calls Faith vindicated, &c. is to prove that which I do not believe any man living ever denied, viz. That what is true is not possible to be false: which though it be one of the plainest truths in the world, yet he proves it so foolishly, as would make any man (if it were not evident of itself) to doubt of it. He proves it from logic, and nature, and metaphysics, and ethics, &c. I wonder he did not do it likewise from arithmetic and geometry, the principles whereof, he tells us, (Sure footing, p. 93.) "are concerned in demonstrating the certainty of oral tradition." He might also have proceeded to astrology, and palmistry, and chemistry, and have shown how each of these lend their assistance to the evidencing of this truth. For that could not have been more ridiculous, than his argument (Faith vindic. p. 6. 7. &c.) from the nature of subject, and predicate, and copula in faith-propositions; because, forsooth, whoever affirms any proposition

tion of faith to be true, affirms it impossible to be false. Very true. But would any man argue, that what is true is impossible to be false, from the nature of subject, predicate, and copula? for be the proposition true or false, these are of the same nature in both; that is, they are subject, predicate, and copula.

But that the reader may have a taste of his clear style, and way of reasoning, I shall for his satisfaction transcribe Mr. S.'s whole argument from the nature of the predicate. His words are these, p. 9, 10, 11, 12.

“ Our argument from the copula is particularly strengthened from the nature of the predicate in the propositions we speak of; I mean, in such speeches as affirm such and such points of faith to be true. For true means existent in propositions which express only the An est of a thing, as most points of faith do; which speak abstractedly, and tell not wherein the nature of the subject it speaks of consists, or the Quid est. So that most of the propositions Christians are bound to profess, are fully expressed thus: A Trinity is existent, &c. And the like may be said of those points which belong to a thing or action past; as, Creation was, &c. For existent is the predicate in these two, only affixed to another difference of time; and it is equally impossible such subjects should neither have been nor not have been, or have been and have not been at once; as it is that a thing should neither be nor not be at present, or both be and not be at present. Regarding then stedfastly the nature of our predicate [existent], we shall find that it expresses the utmost actuality of a thing; and as taken in the posture it bears in these propositions, that actually exercised, that is, the utmost actuality in its most actual state; that is, as absolutely excluding all manner or least degree of potentiality, and consequently all possibility of being otherwise; which is radically destroyed when all potentiality is taken away. This discourse holding, which in right to truth I shall not fear to affirm (unconcerned in the drollery of any opposer) to be more than mathematically demonstrative; it follows inevitably, that whoso is bound to profess a Trinity, incarnation, &c. is or was existent, is also bound to pro-

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“ fess



“ *sees that it is impossible they should be not existent ;*  
 “ *or, which is all one, that it is impossible these points*  
 “ *of faith should be false.*

“ *The same appears out of the nature of distinction or*  
 “ *division applied to our predicate existent, as found in*  
 “ *these propositions : for could that predicate bear a per-*  
 “ *tinent distinction, expressing this and the other respect,*  
 “ *or thus and thus, it might possible be according to one*  
 “ *of these respects, or thus considered, and not be accord-*  
 “ *ing to another ; that is, another way considered : but*  
 “ *this evasion is here impossible ; for either those distin-*  
 “ *guishing notions must be more potential or antecedent to*  
 “ *the notion of existent ; and then they neither reach exist-*  
 “ *ent, nor supervene to it as its determinations or actua-*  
 “ *tions, which differences ought to do ; nor can any noti-*  
 “ *on be more actual or determinative in the line of sub-*  
 “ *stance or being, than existent is ; and so fit to distin-*  
 “ *guish it in that line : nor, lastly, can any determinati-*  
 “ *on in the line of accidents serve the turn ; for those sup-*  
 “ *pose existence already put, and so the whole truth of the*  
 “ *proposition entire and compleat antecedently to them.*  
 “ *It is impossible therefore that what is thus affirmed to*  
 “ *be true, should in any regard be affirmed possible to be*  
 “ *false : the impossibility of distinguishing the predicate*  
 “ *pertinently excluding here all possibility of divers re-*  
 “ *spects.*

“ *The same is demonstrated from the impossibility of dis-*  
 “ *tinguishing the subjects of those faith-propositions ; for*  
 “ *those subjects being propositions themselves, and accepted*  
 “ *for truths, as is supposed, they are incapable of distin-*  
 “ *ction, as shall be particularly shewn hereafter. Besides,*  
 “ *those subjects being points of faith, and so standing in*  
 “ *the abstract ; that is, not descending to subsuming res-*  
 “ *pects ; even in that regard too they are freed from all*  
 “ *pertinent distinguishableness.*

“ *The same is demonstrated from the nature of truth,*  
 “ *which consists in an indivisible ; whence there is nothing*  
 “ *of truth bad, how great soever the conceived approaches*  
 “ *towards it may be, till all may-not-be's, or potentia-*  
 “ *lity to be otherwise, be utterly excluded by the actuali-*  
 “ *ty of is, or existence ; which put or discovered, the light*

“ of



“ of truth breaks forth, and the dim twilights of may-not-be’s vanish and disappear.”

I have here, reader, presented thee with a discourse which (if we may believe Mr. S.) “ is more than mathematically demonstrative.” A rare sight indeed! And is not this a pleasant man, and of good assurance? I now find it true, which he says elsewhere, (Letter of thanks, p. 1.) that “ principles are of an inflexible genius, and self-confident too; and that they love naturally to express themselves with an assuredness.” But certainly the sacred names of principles and demonstration were never so profaned by any man before. Might not any one write a book of such jargon, and call it demonstration? And would it not equally serve to prove or confute? If he intended this stuff for the satisfaction of the people, he might as well have writ in the Coptic or Sclavonian language: yet I cannot deny, but that it is very suitable to the principles of the Roman church; for why should not their science, as well as their service, be in an unknown tongue; that the one may be as fit to improve their knowledge, as the other is to raise their devotion? But if he designed this for the learned, nothing could be more improper; for they are far less apt to admire nonsense than the common people: and I desire that no man (how learned soever he may think himself) would be over-confident, that this is sense. I do verily believe, that neither Harphius, nor Rusbrocius, nor the profound mother Juliana, have any thing in their writings more senseless and obscure than this discourse of his, which he affirms to be “ more than mathematically demonstrative.” So that, if I were worthy to advise Mr. S. he should give over his pretence to science; for whatever he may think, his talent certainly does not lie that way; but he seems to be as well made for a mystical divine, as any man I know; and methinks his superiors should be sensible of this, and employ him to write about the deform fund of the soul, the super-essential life, the method of self-annihilation, and the passive unions of nothing with nothing; these are profound subjects, and he hath a style peculiarly fitted for them. For even in this parcel of stuff which I have now cited, there are five or six words, such as may-not-be’s, potentiality, actuality, actuation, determinative, supervene and subsume, which (if they were

but well mingled and discreetly ordered, and brought in now and then with a that is, to explain one another) would half set up a man in that way, and enable him to write as mystical a discourse as a man could wish. But enough of this. And I have trespassed not a little upon mine own disposition in saying thus much, though out of a just indignation at confident nonsense.

It is now time to draw towards a conclusion of this debate. I shall only leave with the reader a few observations concerning this book of Mr. S.'s, and his doctrine of infallibility.

1. That the main drift of his book being to prove, that what is true is impossible to be false, he opposes no body that I know of in this matter.

2. That in asserting infallibility to be necessary to the true nature of faith, he hath the generality of his own church his professed adversaries. The church of Rome never arrogated to herself any other infallibility but what she pretends to be founded upon Christ's promise to secure his church always from error by a supernatural assistance; which is widely different from Mr. S.'s rational infallibility of oral tradition. Mr. S. surely cannot be ignorant, that the divines of their church (till Mr. Rushworth and Mr. White found out this new way) did generally resolve faith into the infallible testimony of the church: and the infallibility of their church, into our Saviour's promise; and the evidence of the true church, into the marks of the church, or the motives of credibility; which motives are acknowledged to be only prudential, and not demonstrative. Bellarmine says, (l. 4. de eccles.) that the marks of the church do not make evidently true; which is the true church, but only evidently credible; "and that (says he) is said to be evidently credible, which is neither seen in itself, nor in its principles; but yet hath so many and so weighty testimonies, that every wise man hath reason to believe it." Becanus (Sum. tom. 2. partic. de fide, c. 1.) to the same purpose, that "the motives of credibility are only the foundation of a prudent, but not of an infallible assent." I know very well that Mr. Knott, and some others, would fain persuade us, that an assent in some sort infallible may be built upon prudential motives; which is as absurd as it is possible: but if it were true,

true, yet Mr. S. would not accept of this sort of infallibility; nothing less will serve him than demonstrative motives, and such as are absolutely conclusive of the thing. Stapleton (as Mr. Gressy tells us) expressly says, that such an infallible certitude of means is not now necessary to the pastors of the church, as was necessary to the Apostles, who were the first founders of the church. So that, according to these authors, there may be true faith where neither the means nor the motives of it are such as to raise our assent to the degree of infallibility. And this is as much to the full as any protestant (that I know of) ever said. Nay, even his friends of the tradition, Mr. Rushworth, Mr. White, and Mr. Gressy, are guilty of the same damnable and fundamental error, as Mr. S. calls it, (Letter to his answerer, p. 5.) For they grant less assurance than that which is infallible, to be sufficient to Christian faith, and that we are justly condemned if we refuse to believe upon such evidence as does ordinarily satisfy prudent men in human affairs. And particularly Mr. White makes a question, whether human nature be capable of infallibility? as I have shewn at large, by clear and full testimonies out of each of these authors, in the Answer to Sure footing, [vol. 3. p. 309. & seqq.]. Of which testimonies though Mr. S. has not thought fit to take the least notice throughout his book; yet I cannot but think it a reasonable request, to desire him to vindicate the divines of his own church (especially those of his own way) from these things, before he charge us any farther with them.

3. That Mr. S. by this principle, that infallibility is necessary to the true nature of faith, makes every true believer infallible in matters of faith; which is such a paradox, as I doubt whether ever it entered into any other man's mind. But if it be true, what need then of any infallibility in Pope or council? And if this infallibility be grounded upon the nature of oral tradition, what need of supernatural assistance? I doubt Mr. S. would be loth to preach this doctrine at Rome? I have often heard, that there is an old testy gentleman lives there, who would take it very ill that any one besides himself should pretend to be infallible.

4. That Mr. S. by his principles does plainly exclude from salvation the generality of his own church, that is, all that do not believe upon his grounds. And this is the necessary

consequence of his reasoning in a late treatise, intitled, *The method to arrive at satisfaction in religion. The principles whereof are these: "That the church is a congregation of faithful; The faithful are those who have true faith; That, till it be known which is the true faith, it cannot be known which is the true church; That which is the true faith, can only be known by the true rule of faith, which is oral tradition; and, That the infallibility of this rule is evident to common sense."* And from these principles he concludes, (§ 21.) "*that those who follow not this rule, and so are out of this church, can have no true faith; and that though many of the points to which they assent are true, yet their assent is not faith: for faith (speaking of Christian faith) is an assent which cannot possibly be false.*" So that the foundation of this method is the self-evident infallibility of oral tradition, which hath been sufficiently considered in the Answer to Sure footing, which yet remains unanswered. That which I am now concerned to take notice of, is, the consequence of this method, which does at one blow excommunicate and unchristian the far greatest part of his own church. For if all who do not follow oral tradition as their only rule of faith are out of the church, and can have no true faith, then all who follow the council of Trent are ipso facto no Christians. For nothing is plainer, than that that council did not make oral tradition the sole rule of their faith, nor rely upon it as such; which hath been proved at large in the Answer to Sure footing.

But why is Mr. S. so zealous in this matter of infallibility? There is a plain reason for it. He finds that confidence, how weakly soever it be grounded, hath some effect upon the common and ignorant people; who are apt to think there is something more than ordinary in a swaggering man, that talks of nothing but principles and demonstration. And so we see it in some other professions. There are a sort of people very well known, who find, that the most effectual way to cheat the people, is always to pretend to infallible cures.

I have now done with his infallibility. But I must not forget his Letter of thanks. I shall wholly pass by the passion and ill language of it, which a man may plainly see to have proceeded from a galled and uneasy mind. He would fain put on some pleasantness, but was not able to conceal his vexation. Nor shall I insist upon his palpable shuffling about  
th

the explication of the terms rule and faith: He was convinced, that he had explained them very unto-wardly, and therefore would gladly come off by saying, (p. 7.), that he did not intend explication, but only to predicate or affirm something of them. And yet the whole design of the first page of Sure footing, is, to shew the necessity of beginning with the meaning of those words which express the thing under debate. And this method he tells us he will apply to his present purpose, and will examine well what is meant by those words which express the thing he was to discuss, namely, the rule of faith. Now, if to examine well what is meant by words, be not to go about to explain them, I must confess myself to be in a great error. Of the same kind is his apology for his testimonies, as if they were (p. 105.) not intended against the Protestants; whereas his book was writ against the Protestants; and when he comes to his testimonies, (Sure footing, p. 126), he declares the design of them to be, to second by authority, what he had before established by reason. So that if the rational part of his book was intended against the Protestants, and the testimonies were designed to second it, I cannot understand why he should say one was less intended against them than the other. But it seems he is so conscious of the weakness of those testimonies, that he does not think them fit to satisfy any but those who believe him already.

As to his charge of false citations, it is but the common artifice of the Roman controvertists, when they have nothing else to say. However, that the world may see how little he is to be trusted, I shall instance in two or three, about which he makes the loudest clamour, and leave it to the reader to judge by these of his sincerity in the rest.

He says, I notoriously abuse the preface to Rushworth's dialogues, in citing the author of it. [vol. 3. p. 316.], to say, that "such certainty as makes the cause always to work the same effect, though it take not away the absolute possibility of working otherwise, ought absolutely to be reckoned in the degree of true certainty;" whereas (says Mr. S.) he only tells us there, p. 7. that "by moral certainty some understood such a certainty as makes the cause, &c." To vindicate myself in this, I shall only set the author's words before the reader's eyes. They are these: "This term moral certainty, every one explicated not alike;

“like; but some understood by it such a certainty as makes  
 “the cause always work the same effect, though it take not  
 “away the absolute possibility of working otherwise. Others  
 “called that a moral certainty which proceeds from, &c.  
 “A third explication of this word is, &c. Of these three  
 “the first ought absolutely to be reckoned in the degree of true  
 “certainty, and the authors considered as mistaken in under-  
 “valuing it.” Is this only to tell us, that by moral certainty  
 some understood, &c.? Does not the prefacer also expressly  
 affirm, that what these some understood by moral  
 certainty, ought absolutely to be reckoned in the degree  
 of true certainty? which is the very thing I cited him for.

Another heavy charge is, that, according to my usual  
 sincerity, I quote Rushworth's nephew to say, [vol. 3.  
 p. 322.], that a few good words are to be cast in concerning  
 scripture, “for the satisfaction of indifferent men who have  
 “been brought up in this verbal and apparent respect of the  
 “scripture;” whereas (says Mr. S.) in the place you cite,  
 he only expresses, “it would be a satisfaction to indifferent  
 “men to see the positions one would induce them to embrace,  
 “maintainable by scripture” Does he only say so? let the  
 reader judge. The words in Mr. Rushworth, p. 76. 77.  
 are these: “Yet this I must tell ye, that it were a great sa-  
 “tisfaction for indifferent men, that have been brought up  
 “in this verbal and apparent respect of the scripture, to see  
 “that the positions you would induce them unto, can be, and  
 “are maintained by scripture, and that they are grounded  
 “therein.” Certainly one would think, that either this man  
 has no eyes, or no forehead.

But the greatest outcry of all is, that I abuse his first de-  
 monstration, by virtue of a direct falsification both of his  
 words and sense, by cogging in the word all, making his  
 principle run thus, that “the greatest hopes and fears are  
 “applied to the minds of [all] Christians.” This indeed  
 I make to be his principle, grounded upon his words which I  
 had cited a little before, [vol. iii. p. 330.] And they are  
 these: “1. That Christian doctrine was at first unanimously  
 “settled by the Apostles in the hearts of the faithful, dis-  
 “persed in great multitudes over several parts of the world.  
 “2. That this doctrine was firmly believed by ALL those  
 “faithful to be the way to heaven, and the contradicting  
 “or deserting of it to be the way to damnation: so that the  
 “greatest hopes and fears imaginable were, by engaging the  
 “divine

“divine authority, strongly applied to the minds of the first believers,” &c. Now, if these first believers, to whom he says these hopes and fears were strongly applied, be all those faithful he spoke of before, which were dispersed over several parts of the world, as the tenor of his words plainly shews, what are these less than all the Christians of that age? And he himself a little after tells us, there is the same reason of the following ages: So that I made his principle run no otherways than he himself had laid it. And if it contradict what he says elsewhere, it is no new or strange thing. I wonder more at his confidence in charging such falsifications upon me, as every man’s eyes will presently confute him in. Methinks, though a man had all science, and all principles; yet it might not be amiss to have some conscience.

I shall only speak a few words to the two solid points, as I may call them, of his Letter, and I have done.

I had charged him, that he makes traditious certainty a first and self evident principle, and yet that he goes about to demonstrate it, which I said was impossible to be done; and if it could be done, was needless. To avoid this inconvenience, which he found himself sorely pressed withal, he distinguishes between speculative and practical self-evidence; and says, that things which are practically self-evident may be demonstrated, but those that are speculatively so, cannot. But he must not think to shelter himself from so palpable an absurdity by this impertinent distinction. For, let things be evident how they will, speculatively or practically, it is plain, that if they be principles evident of themselves, they need nothing to evidence them; and if they be first principles, there can be nothing to make them more evident, because there is nothing before them to demonstrate them by. Now, if Mr. S. had in truth believed that the certainty of tradition was a first and self-evident principle, he should by all means have let it alone; for it was in a very good condition to shift for itself; but his blind way of demonstration is enough to cast a mist about the clearest truth in the world. But perhaps, by the self-evident certainty of tradition, Mr. S. only means that it is evident to himself; for I dare say it is so to nobody else. And if that be his meaning, he did well enough to endeavour to demonstrate it; it was no more than needed.

The other point is about his first principles; such as these, A rule is a rule, faith is faith, &c. which he says, p. 11. “must principle all that can be solidly concluded either about

“rule.



“rule or faith.” Of these he hath mighty store, and blesteth himself in it, as the rich man in the gospel did in his full barns, Soul, take thine ease, thou hast principles laid up for many years; and out of an excess of good nature pities my case, p. 74. who did “undertake to write a discourse about the ground of faith, without so much as one principle to bless myself with.” But the mischief is, that after all this stir about them, they are good for nothing, and of the very same stamp with that frivolous one Aristotle (Analyt. Poster. l. 7.) speaks of, If a thing be, it is, which he rejects as a vain and ridiculous proposition. Such are Mr. S.’s first principles, surfeited of too much truth, (as an ingenious writer of his own church says of them,) and ready to burst with self-evidence; and yet by ten thousand of them a man shall not be able to advance one step in knowledge, because they produce no conclusion but themselves; whereas it is of the nature of principles to yield a conclusion different from themselves. And to convince Mr. S. fully of the foolery of these principles, I will try what can be done with them either in a categorical or hypothetical syllogism, e. g. “A rule is a rule; tradition is a rule; ergo, tradition is a rule.” Again, “If a rule be a rule, then a rule is a rule; but a rule is a rule; ergo.” How is any man the wiser for all this? But it may be Mr. S. can make better work with them, and manage them more dexterously, so as to principle any thing that can be solidly concluded in any controversy.

And now I hope at last to have given Mr. S. full satisfaction, since he has brought me to the very point he desired, to acknowledge that I have no principles. And indeed, if there be no other to be had, but such as these, I do declare to all the world, that I neither have any principles, nor will have any.



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# S E R M O N I.

## The wisdom of being religious.

J O B xxviii. 28.

*And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.*

**I**N this chapter Job discourseth of the secrets of nature, and the unsearchable perfections of the works of God. And the result of his discourse is this: That a perfect knowledge of nature is no where to be found but in the author of it; no less wisdom and understanding than that which made the world, and contrived this vast and regular frame of nature, can thoroughly understand the philosophy of it, and comprehend so vast a design. But yet there is a knowledge which is very proper to man, and lies level to human understanding; and that is, the knowledge of our creator, and of the duty we owe to him; the wisdom of pleasing God, by doing what he commands, and avoiding what he forbids. This knowledge and wisdom may be attained by man, and is sufficient to make him happy: *And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.*

These words consist of two propositions, which are not distinct in sense, but one and the same thing variously expressed; for *wisdom* and *understanding* are synonymous words here: and though sometimes they have different notions, yet in the poetical books of scripture they are most frequently used as words equivalent; and do both of them indifferently signify either a speculative knowledge of things, or a practical skill about them, according to the exigency of the matter or thing spoken of. And so likewise *the fear of the Lord*, and *departure from evil*, are phrases of a very near sense, and like importance: and therefore we find them several times put together in scripture: Prov. iii. 7. *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil.*

Chap. xvi. 6. *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* So that they differ only as cause and effect; which, by a metonymy usual in all sorts of authors, are frequently put one for another.

Now, *to fear the Lord,* and *to depart from evil,* are phrases which the scripture useth in a very great latitude, to express to us the sum of religion, and the whole of our duty. And because the large usage of these phrases is to be the foundation of my following discourse, I shall, for the farther clearing of this matter, endeavour to shew these two things.

1. That it is very usual in the language of scripture to express the whole of religion by these and such like phrases.

2. The particular fitness of these two phrases to describe religion.

1. It is very usual in the language of scripture to express the whole of religion by some eminent principle or part of religion.

The great principles of religion are, knowledge, faith, remembrance, love, and fear; by all which the scripture useth to express the whole duty of man.

In the Old Testament, by *the knowledge, remembrance and fear, of God.* Religion is called *the knowledge of the Holy,* Prov. xxx. 3. And wicked men are described to be such as *know not God,* Jer. x. 25. So likewise, by *the fear of the Lord,* frequently in this book of Job, and in the Psalms and Proverbs. And *then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another,* Mal. iii. 16. And the fear of God is expressly said to be the sum of religion: *Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man,* Eccl. xii. 13. And, on the contrary, the wicked are described to be such as *have not the fear of God before their eyes,* Psal. xxxvi. 1. And so likewise by *the remembrance of God: Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth,* Eccl. xii. 1.; that is, enter upon a religious course betimes. And, on the contrary, the character of the wicked is, that they forget God: *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God,* Psal. ix. 17. In the New Testament, religion is usually expressed by *faith in God and Christ, and the love of them.* Hence it is, that true Christians are

so frequently called *believers*, and wicked and ungodly men *unbelievers*; and that good men are described to be such as love God: *All things work together for good to them that love God*, Rom. viii. 28. ; and *such as love the Lord Jesus Christ*, Eph. vi. 24. Now, the reason why these are put for the whole of religion, is, because the belief, and knowledge, and remembrance, and love, and fear of God, are such powerful principles, and have so great an influence upon men to make them religious, that where any one of these really is, all the rest, together with the true and genuine effects of them, are supposed to be.

And so likewise the sum of all religion is often expressed by some eminent part of it; which will explain the second phrase here in the text, *departing from evil*. The worship of God is an eminent part of religion; and prayer, which is often in scripture expressed by *seeking God*, and *calling upon his name*, is a chief part of religious worship. Hence religion is described by *seeking God*: *He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi. 6. ; and by *calling upon his name*: *Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved*, Acts ii. 21. ; and so by *coming to God*, and by *departing from evil*. In this fallen state of man, religion begins with repentance and conversion; the two opposite terms of which are, God, and sin. Hence it is that religion is described sometimes by *coming to God*: *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is*, Heb. xi. 6. ; that is, no man can be religious, unless he believes there is a God: sometimes by *departing from sin*: *And he that departeth from evil, maketh himself a prey*, Ps. lix. 15. ; that is, such was the bad state of those times of which the Prophet there complains, that no man could be religious but he was in danger of being persecuted.

II. For the fitness of these two phrases to describe religion.

1. For the first, *the fear of the Lord*; the fitness of this phrase will appear, if we consider how great an influence the fear of God hath upon men to make them religious. Fear is a passion that is most deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man.

Every one desires his own preservation and happiness, and therefore hath a natural dread and horror of every thing that can destroy his being, or endanger his happiness. And the greatest danger is from the greatest power; and that is omnipotency. So that the fear of God is an inward acknowledgment of a holy and just being, which is armed with an almighty and irresistible power; God having hid in every man's conscience a secret awe and dread of his infinite power and eternal justice. Now, fear being so intimate to our natures, it is the strongest bond of laws, and the great security of our duty.

There are two bridles or restraints which God hath put upon human nature; shame, and fear. Shame is the weaker, and hath place only in those in whom there are some remainders of virtue. Fear is the stronger; and works upon all who love themselves, and desire their own preservation. Therefore, in this degenerate state of mankind, fear is that passion which hath the greatest power over us, and by which God and his laws take the surest hold of us. Our desire, and love, and hope, are not so apt to be wrought upon by the representation of virtue, and the promises of reward and happiness, as our fear is from the apprehensions of divine displeasure. For though we have lost in a great measure the gust and relish of true happiness, yet we still retain a quick sense of pain and misery. So that fear relies upon a natural love of ourselves, and is complicated with a necessary desire of our own preservation. And therefore religion usually makes its first entrance into us by this passion. Hence perhaps it is that Solomon more than once calls *the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom.*

2. As for the second phrase, *departing from evil*; the fitness of it to express the whole duty of man will appear, if we consider the necessary connexion that is between the negative and the positive part of our duty. He that is careful to avoid all sin, will sincerely endeavour to perform his duty. For the soul of man is an active principle, and will be employed one way or other; it will be doing something. If a man abstain from evil, he will do good. Now, there being such a strait connexion between these, the whole of our duty may be expressed by either of them; but most fitly by *departing from evil*, because

because that is the first part of our duty. Religion begins in the forsaking of sin.

*Virtus est vitium fugere, & sapientia prima  
Stultitiâ caruisse —*

“Virtue begins in the forsaking of vice; and the first part of wisdom is, not to be a fool.” And therefore the scripture, which mentions these parts of our duty, doth constantly put departing from evil first: *Depart from evil, and do good*, Psal. xxxiv. 14. & xxxvii. 27.; *Cease to do evil, learn to do well*, II. i. 16. 17.; *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord*, chap. lv. 7. We are first to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; and then to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new man, &c. Eph. iv. 22. 23. 24. *Let him eschew evil, and do good*, I Pet. iii. 11. To all which I may add this farther consideration, that the law of God contained in the ten commandments consisting mostly of prohibitions, (Thou shalt not do such or such a thing), our observance of it is most fitly expressed by *departing from evil*; which yet includes obedience likewise to the positive precepts implied in those prohibitions.

Having thus explained the words, I come now to consider the proposition contained in them; which is this:

That religion is the best knowledge and wisdom.

This I shall endeavour to make good these three ways.

1. By a direct proof of it.
2. By shewing, on the contrary, the folly and ignorance of irreligion and wickedness.
3. By vindicating religion from those common imputations which seem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence.

*First*, I begin with the direct proof of this. And, because religion comprehends two things, the knowledge of the principles of it, and a suitable life and practice; (the first of which, being speculative, may more properly be called *knowledge*; and the latter, because it is practical, may be called *wisdom*, or *prudence*); therefore I shall endeavour distinctly to prove these two things.

1. That religion is the best knowledge.
2. That it is the truest wisdom.



## I. That it is the best knowledge.

The knowledge of religion commends itself to us upon these two accounts.

1. It is the knowledge of those things which are in themselves most excellent.

2. Of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know.

1<sup>st</sup>, It is the best knowledge, because it is the knowledge of those things which are in themselves most excellent and desirable to be known; and those are, God, and our duty. God is the sum and comprehension of all perfection. It is delightful to know the creatures, because there are particular excellencies scattered and dispersed among them, which are some shadows of the divine perfections. But in God all perfections, in their highest degree and exaltation, meet together and are united. How much more delightful then must it needs be to fix our minds upon such an object, in which there is nothing but beauty and brightness; what is amiable, and what is excellent; what will ravish our affections and raise our wonder, please us and astonish us at once? And that the finite measure and capacity of our understandings is not able to take in and comprehend the infinite perfections of God, this indeed shews the excellency of the object, but doth not altogether take away the delightfulness of the knowledge. For as it is pleasant to the eye to have an endless prospect, so is it some pleasure to a finite understanding to view unlimited excellencies which have no shore or bounds, though it cannot comprehend them. There is a pleasure in admiration: and this is that which properly causeth admiration, when we discover a great deal in an object which we understand to be excellent, and yet we see we know not how much more beyond that, which our understandings cannot fully reach and comprehend.

And as the knowledge of God in his nature and perfections is excellent and desirable, so likewise to know him in those glorious manifestations of himself in the works of creation and providence; and above all, in that stupendous work of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, which was such a mystery, and so excellent a piece of knowledge, that *the angels are said to desire to pry into it*, 1 Pet. i. 12.

And



And as the knowledge of God is excellent, so likewise of our duty; which is nothing else but virtue, and goodness, and holiness, which are the image of God; a conformity to the nature and will of God, and an imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections, so far as we are capable: for to know our duty, is to know what it is to be like God in goodness, and pity, and patience, and clemency; in pardoning injuries, and passing by provocations; in justice and righteousness, in truth and faithfulness, and in a hatred and detestation of the contrary of these. In a word, it is to know what is the good and acceptable will of God, what it is that he loves and delights in, and is pleased withal, and would have us to do in order to our perfection and our happiness. It is deservedly accounted a piece of excellent knowledge, to know the laws of the land and the customs of the country we live in, and the will of the prince we live under: how much more to know the statutes of heaven, and the laws of eternity, those immutable and eternal rules of justice and righteousness; to know the will and pleasure of the great monarch and universal king of the world, and the customs of that country where we must live for ever? This made David to admire the law of God at that strange rate, and to advance the knowledge of it above all other knowledge: *I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad,* Psal. cxix. 96.

2dly, It is the knowledge of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know. The goodness of every thing is measured by its end and use; and that is the best thing which serves the best end and purpose; and the more necessary any thing is to such an end, the better it is; so that the best knowledge is that which is of greatest use and necessity to us in order to our great end; which is, eternal happiness, and the salvation of our souls. Curious speculations, and the contemplation of things that are impertinent to us, and do not concern us, nor serve to promote our happiness, are but a more specious and ingenious sort of idleness, a more pardonable and creditable kind of ignorance. That man that doth not know those things which are of use and necessity for him to know, is but an ignorant man, whatever he may know besides. Now, the knowledge

of God, and of Christ, and of our duty, is of the greatest usefulness and necessity to us in order to our happiness. It is of absolute necessity that we should know God and Christ, in order to our being happy: *This is life eternal, (that is, the only way to it), to know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ,* John xvii. 3. It is necessary also, in order to our happiness, to know our duty; because it is necessary for us to do it, and it is impossible to do it except we know it.

So that whatsoever other knowledge a man may be endued withal, he is but an ignorant person who doth not know God, the author of his being, the preserver and protector of his life, his sovereign and his judge, the giver of every good and perfect gift, his surest refuge in trouble, his best friend or worst enemy, the present support of his life, his hopes in death, his future happiness, and his portion for ever; who does not know his relation to God, the duty that he owes him, and the way to please him who can make him happy or miserable for ever; who doth not know the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

If a man, by a vast and imperious mind, and a heart large as the sand upon the sea shore, (as it is said of Solomon), could command all the knowledge of nature and art, of words and things; could attain to a mastery in all languages, and sound the depths of all arts and sciences; measure the earth and the heavens, and tell the stars, and declare their order and motions; could discourse of the interests of all states, the intrigues of all courts, the reason of all civil laws and constitutions, and give an account of the history of all ages; could speak of trees, *from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wall; and of beasts also, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes;* and yet should, in the mean time, be destitute of the knowledge of God and Christ, and his duty: all this would be but an impertinent vanity, and a more glittering kind of ignorance; and such a man (like the philosopher, who, whilst he was gazing upon the stars, fell into the ditch) would but *sapienter descendere in infernum*, be undone with all this knowledge, and with a great deal of wisdom go down to hell.

II. That to be religious is the truest wisdom; and that likewise upon two accounts.

1. Because it is to be wise for ourselves.

2. It is to be wise as to our main interest and concernment.

1<sup>st</sup>, It is to be wise for ourselves. There is an expression, Job xxii. 2. *He that is wise, is profitable to himself*; and, Prov. ix. 12. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself*: intimating, that wisdom regards a man's own interest and advantage; and that he is not a wise man that doth not take care of himself and his own concernments; according to that of old Ennius, *Nequicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret*. "That man hath but an empty title of wisdom, and is not really wise, who is not wise for himself." As self-preservation is the first principle of nature, so care of ourselves and our own interest is the first part of wisdom. He that is wise in the affairs and concernments of other men, but careless and negligent of his own, that man may be said to be busy, but he is not wise: he is employed indeed, but not so as a wise man should be. Now, this is the wisdom of religion, that it directs a man to a care of his own proper interest and concernment.

2<sup>dly</sup>, It is to be wise as to our main interest. Our chief end and highest interest is happiness: and this is happiness, to be freed from all, if it may be, however from the greatest evils; and to enjoy, if it may be, all good, however the chiefest. To be happy, is not only to be freed from the pains and diseases of the body, but from anxiety and vexation of spirit; not only to enjoy the pleasures of sense, but peace of conscience, and tranquillity of mind. To be happy, is not only to be so for a little while, but as long as may be; and, if it be possible, for ever. Now, religion designs our greatest and longest happiness; it aims at a freedom from the greatest evils, and to bring us to the possession and enjoyment of the greatest good: for religion wisely considers, that men have immortal spirits; which, as they are spirits, are capable of a pleasure and happiness distinct from that of our bodies and our senses; and, because they are immortal, are capable of an everlasting happiness. Now, our souls being the best part of ourselves, and eternity being infinitely

finitely the most considerable duration, the greatest wisdom is, to secure the interest of our souls and of eternity; though it be with loss, and to the prejudice of our temporal and inferior interests. Therefore religion directs us rather to secure inward peace than outward ease; to be more careful to avoid everlasting and intolerable torment, than short and light afflictions which are but for a moment; to court the favour of God more than the friendship of the world; and not so much to fear them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, as him who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell. In a word, our main interest is, to be as happy as we can, and as long as is possible; and if we be cast into such circumstances, that we must be either in part, and for a time, or else wholly and always miserable, the best wisdom is, to chuse the greatest and most lasting happiness, but the least and shortest misery. Upon this account religion prefers those pleasures which flow from the presence of God for evermore, infinitely before the transitory pleasures of this world; and is much more careful to avoid eternal misery than present sufferings. This is the wisdom of religion, that, upon consideration of the whole, and casting up all things together, it does advise and lead us to our best interest.

Secondly, The second way of confirmation shall be by endeavouring to shew the ignorance and folly of irreligion. Now, all that are irreligious are so upon one of these two accounts: either, first, Because they do not believe the foundations and principles of religion, as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and future rewards: or else, secondly, Because, though they do in some sort believe these things, yet they live contrary to this their belief; and of this kind are the far greatest part of wicked men. The first sort are guilty of that which we call *speculative*; the other, of *practical* Atheism. I shall endeavour to shew the ignorance and folly of both these.

First, *Speculative* Atheism is unreasonable; and that upon these five accounts. 1. Because it gives no tolerable account of the existence of the world. 2. Nor does it give any reasonable account of the universal consent of mankind in this apprehension, that there is a God.

3. It requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. 4. The Atheist pretends to know that which no man can know. 5. Atheism contradicts itself.

I. Because it gives no tolerable account of the existence of the world. One of the greatest difficulties that lies in the Atheist's way is, upon his own supposition, that there is no God, to give a likely account of the existence of the world. We see this vast frame of the world, and an innumerable multitude of creatures in it; all which we who believe a God, attribute to him as the author of them. For a being supposed of infinite goodness, and wisdom, and power, is a very likely cause of these things. What more likely to make this vast world, to stretch forth the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and to form these, and all things in them, of nothing, than infinite power? what more likely to communicate being, and so many degrees of happiness, to so many several sorts of creatures, than infinite goodness? what more likely to contrive this admirable frame of the universe, and all the creatures in it, each of them so perfect in their kind, and all of them so fitted to each other, and to the whole, than infinite counsel and wisdom? This seems to be no unreasonable account.

But let us see now what account the Atheist gives of these things. If there be no God, there are but these two ways imaginable for the world to be. Either it must be said, that not only the matter, but also the frame of this world is eternal; and that, as to the main, things always were as they are, without any first cause of their being; which is the way of the Aristotelian Atheist, (those I mean who proceed upon Aristotle's supposition of the eternity of the world, but yet deny it to be from God, which he expressly asserts): or else, the matter of the world being supposed to be eternal, and of itself, the original of this vast and beautiful frame must be ascribed merely to chance, and the casual concurrence of the parts of matter; which is the way of the Epicurean Atheist. But neither of these ways gives a tolerable account of the existence of the world.

I shall *first* consider the hypothesis of those whom, for distinction's sake, I call the *Aristotelian* Atheists; which is this, That not only the matter, but also the frame of the world

world is eternal; and that, as to the main, it was always as it is, of itself; and that there hath been from all eternity a succession of men and other creatures without any first cause of their being.

It seems to be very hard, and, if that would do any good, might be just matter of complaint, that we are fallen into so profane and sceptical an age, which takes a pleasure and a pride in unravelling almost all the received principles both of religion and reason: so that we are put many times to prove those things which can hardly be made plainer than they are of themselves. And such almost are these principles, That God is, and, That all things were made by him; which, by reason of the bold cavils of perverse and unreasonable men, we are now-a-days put to defend.

That something is of itself, is evident, because we see things are. And the things that we see, must either have had some first cause of their being, or have been always, and of themselves. One of these two is unavoidable.

So that the controversy between us and this sort of Atheists comes to this: Which is the more credible opinion, That the world was never made, nor had a beginning, but always was as it is; and that there hath been from all eternity a succession of men and other creatures without any first cause of their being: or, That there was from all eternity such a being as we conceive God to be, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, which made us and all other things? The first of these opinions I shall shew to be altogether incredible; and the latter to have all the credibility and evidence of which a thing of that nature is capable, and such evidence as is sufficient to convince any impartial and considerate man.

Now, in comparing the probabilities of things, that we may know on which side the advantage lies, these two considerations are of great moment; What the arguments are on each side? and, What the difficulties? For if there be fair proofs on the one side, and none at all on the other; and if the most pressing difficulties be on that side on which there are no proofs, this is sufficient to render one opinion very credible, and the other altogether incredible.

These

These two things therefore I shall endeavour to make good in the matter that is now under our consideration.

1. That there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other. And, 2. That the side on which there is no proof, is incumbered with the greatest difficulties.

1st, That there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other.

This question, Whether the world was created, and had a beginning, or not? is a question concerning an ancient matter of fact, which can only be decided these two ways; by testimony, and by probabilities of reason. Testimony is the principal argument in a matter of this nature; and if fair probabilities of reason concur with it, this argument hath all the strength it can have. Now, both these are clearly on the affirmative side of the question, *viz.* That the world was created, and had a beginning.

1st, Testimony; of which there be two kinds, divine and human.

Divine testimony, as such, is not proper to be used in this cause, considering the occasion of the present debate: for that would be to beg the first and main question now in controversy; which is, Whether there be a God or not? which a testimony from God does suppose, and therefore ought not to be brought for the proof of it. It is true indeed, that those effects of divine power, I mean miracles, which will prove a divine testimony to an infidel, will as well prove the being of a God to an Atheist. But when we dispute against those who deny a God, no testimony ought to be presumed to be from God, but must be proved to be so. And whatever argument proves that, will also prove that there is a God.

Human testimonies are of two sorts; universal tradition, and written history. Both these are plainly and beyond dispute on our side.

1. There is an universal tradition concerning the beginning of the world, and that it was made by God. And for the evidence of this we have the concurring tradition of the most ancient nations, the Egyptians and Phe-



nicians\* ; and of the most barbarous, the Indians, who, as Strabo, *Geogr.* l. 15. tell us, “ did in many things “ agree with the Grecians, particularly in this, that the “ world did begin, and should have an end; and that “ God, the maker and governor of it, is present in “ all parts of it.” And Acoſta tells us, that, at the first discovery of America, the inhabitants of Peru did worship one chief God, under the name or title of *The maker of the universe*. And yet these people had not had any commerce with the other known parts of the world, for God knows how many ages.

To which may be added, that the most ancient of the philosophers, and those that were the heads of the chief sects of philosophy, as Thales, Anaxagoras, and Pythagoras, did likewise consent to this tradition. Particularly, concerning Thales, Tully, *De nat. Deorum* l. 1. tell us, that “ he was the first of all the philosophers “ that inquired into these things; and he said, that water “ was the beginning of all things, and that God was that “ mind (or intelligent principle) which fashioned all “ things out of water.” So likewise Strabo, *Geogr.* l. 15. inform us, that the Brachmans, the chief sect of philosophers among the Indians, agreed with the Grecians in this, “ That the world was made of water.” Which agrees exactly with Moses’s account of the creation, *viz.* That *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*: which St. Peter expresses thus, That *by the word of God the heavens and the earth* (for so the Hebrews call the world) *were of old ἐξ ὕδατος συνεσθαι, constituted or made of water*, 2 Pet. iii. 5. not standing out of the water, as our translation renders it.

Nay, Aristotle himself, *Metaph.* l. 1 c. 3. who was the great asserter of the eternity of the world, gives this account why the gods were anciently represented by the Heathens as swearing by the lake Styx, because water was supposed to be the principle of all things. And this, he tells us, was the most ancient opinion concerning the original of the world; and that the very oldest writers of theology, and those who lived at the greatest distance from his time, were of this mind. And, in the book *De mundo*, c. 6. it is freely acknowledged to have been

† Vide Grot, de verit. Christ. relig. l. 1.



been an ancient saying, and a general tradition among all men; That all things are of God, and were made by him. I will conclude this with that full testimony of Maximus Tyrius to this purpose: "However (says he, *disfertat.* 1.) men may differ in many things, yet they all agree in this law or principle, That there is one God, King and Father of all things,, &c. This the Greeks say, this the Barbarians; this those that live upon the continent, and those that dwell by the sea; the wise and the unwise."

2. We have likewise a most ancient and credible history of the beginning of the world; I mean, the history of Moses; with which no book in the world in point of antiquity can contend. I shall not now go about to strengthen my argument, by pleading the divine authority of this book; for which yet I could offer good evidence, if that were proper to the matter in hand. It is sufficient to my present purpose, that Moses have the ordinary credit of an historian given him; which none in reason can deny him; he being cited by the most ancient of the Heathen historians, and the antiquity of his writings never questioned by any of them, as Josephus, *l. 1. cont. Apion.* assures us.

Now, this history of Moses gives us a particular account of the beginning of the world, and of the creation of it by God. Which assertion of his is agreeable to the most ancient writers among the Heathen, whether poets or historians. And several of the main parts of Moses's history, as concerning the flood, and the first fathers of the several nations of the world, (of which he gives a particular account Gen. x.) do very well accord with the most ancient accounts of profane history. And I do not know, whether any thing ought more to recommend the writings of Moses to a human belief, than the easy and credible account which he gives of the original of the world, and of the first peopling of it.

As to the account of ancient times, both the Egyptian and Chaldean accounts, which are pretended by some to be so vastly different from that of the scriptures, may for all that be, near the matter, easily reconciled with it\*; if we do but admit what Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch,

\* *Vide* Dr. Stillingfleet's *Orig. sacr.* where this is fully made out.

very credible persons, and diligent searchers into ancient books, do most expressly assure us, *viz.* that both those nations did anciently reckon months for years. And the account of the Chinese is not hard to be reconciled with that of the Septuagint. Now, in so nice and obscure a matter as the account of ancient times is, it ought to satisfy any fair and reasonable inquirer, if they can be brought any whit near one another.

So that universal tradition, and the most ancient history in the world, are clearly on our side. And if they be, one can hardly wish a more convincing argument. For, if the world, and consequently mankind, had a beginning, there is all the reason in the world to expect these two things. 1. That there should be an universal tradition concerning this matter; because it was the most memorable thing that could be transmitted to posterity. And this was easy to be done, if mankind sprang from one common root and original, from whence this tradition would naturally be universally diffused. 2. It may with the same reason be expected, that so remarkable a thing should be recorded in the most ancient history. Now, both these have accordingly happened. But then, on the other hand, if the world was eternal, and had no beginning, there could be no real ground for such a tradition or history. And if such a tradition were at any time endeavoured to be set on foot, it is not easy to imagine how it should at first gain entertainment; but much more difficult to conceive, how ever it should come to be universally propagated. For, upon the supposition of those who hold the eternity of the world, the world was always peopled; and if so, there could be no common head or spring from whence such a tradition would naturally derive itself into all parts of the world. So that unless all the world was sometime of one language, and under one government, (which it never was that we know of since it was peopled), no endeavour and industry could make such a tradition common.

If it be said, That this tradition began after some universal deluge, out of which possibly but one family might escape, and that possibly too of barbarous people; from whom any fond and groundless conceit might spring, and afterwards spread itself as mankind increased: This

I shall

I shall have occasion to consider in a more proper place: In the mean time I have shewn, even from the acknowledgement of Aristotle himself, that there was anciently such a tradition concerning the beginning of the world. Nay, if we may believe him, he himself was the very first asserter of the eternity of the world: for he says expressly, “That all the philosophers that were before him did hold that the world was made,” *De cælo*, l. 1. c. 10. Thus much for the first kind of proof this matter is capable of, namely, testimony.

*zdy*, The probabilities of reason do all likewise favour the beginning of the world: As,

1. The want of any history or tradition ancients than what is consistent with the received opinion of the time of the world's beginning; nay the most ancient histories were written long after that time. This Lucretius, the famous Epicurean, urgeth as a strong presumption that the world had a beginning:

— *Si nulla fuit genitalis origo  
Terrarum & cæli, semperque æterna fuerit;  
Cur supra bellum Thebanum, & funera Trojæ,  
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poetæ?*

*i. e.* “If the world had no beginning, how is it that the Greek poets (the most antient of their writers) mention nothing higher than the Theban war, and the destruction of Troy?” Were there from all eternity no memorable actions done till about that time? or had mankind no way till of late to record them, and propagate the memory of them to posterity? It is much, if men were from eternity, that they should not find out the way of writing in all that long duration which had past before that time. Sure he was a fortunate man indeed, who, after men had been eternally so dull as not to find it out, had the luck at last to hit upon it.

But it may be, the famous actions of former times were always recorded, but that the memorials of them have been several times lost by universal deluges, which have now and then happened, and swept all away, except (it may be) two or three persons that have escaped, and begun the world again upon a new score. This is the only refuge that the Atheist hath to fly to; when he

is pressed with this and the like arguments. But he cannot possibly escape this way: for these universal inundations must either be natural or supernatural. If they be supernatural, (as any man that considers well the frame of the world, and how hard it is to give a natural reason of them, would be inclined to think), then indeed it is easy to conceive, how a few of mankind, and no more, should escape; because this will depend upon the pleasure of that superior being which is supposed supernaturally to order these things. But this is to yield what we have all this while contended for, *viz.* That there is a God. But if they be natural, which the Atheist must say, then there is nothing to restrain them from a total destruction; not only of mankind, but of all the beasts of the earth. This the Atheist cannot deny, not only to be very possible, but exceeding probable; because he grants it to have come so near the matter, that but very few escaped, and no doubt with great difficulty. Now, it is the greatest wonder in the world, that a thing, according to their own supposition, so likely to happen, should never have fallen out in an infinite duration. Will any man have the face to say, that a thing is likely, which did never yet happen from all eternity? One would think, that not only whatever is probable, but whatever can possibly happen, should be brought about in that space; so that, if mankind had been from eternity, it had in all probability, I had almost said, been destroyed from all eternity; but I may confidently say, long since ruined.

2 Another probability of the world's beginning is, the account which we have of the original of learning, and the most useful arts in several parts of the world. Now, if the world had been eternal, these in all likelihood would have been found out, and generally spread long ago, and beyond the memory of all ages. There are some arts indeed that are peculiarly convenient to some particular nations, and others that are only serviceable to the humour and fashion of one or more ages. These are not likely to spread; and they may come in, and go out, and return again as often as there is occasion. But those which are generally useful to mankind in all times and places, if they were once found out, (and

(and who would not think they should in an eternal duration?) it is not imaginable but that they should have been spread innumerable ages since. Nor can any man give a good reason how they should ever be lost, but by some such accident as an universal deluge; which has been spoken to already. But now, on the contrary, the beginnings of learning, and of the most useful arts in several nations, is very well known. And I add farther, that where-ever learning and civil arts have come, this tradition concerning the beginning of the world hath been most vigorous, and asserted with the greatest clearness and confidence.

3. The several parts of which the world consists, being (so far as, by those parts of it which we know, we can possibly judge of the rest) in their nature corruptible, it is more than probable, that in an infinite duration this frame of things would long since have been dissolved; especially if, as the Atheist affirms, there be no superior being, no wise and intelligent principle, to repair and regulate it, and to prevent those innumerable disorders and calamitous accidents, which must in so long a space in all probability have happened to it. This Lucretius, l. 5. also urges as a convincing proof that the world was not eternal.

*Quare etiam nativa necesse est confiteare  
Hæc eadem; neque enim mortali corpore quæ sunt,  
Ex infinito jam tempore adhuc potuissent  
Immensi validas ævi contemnere vires.*

“ It must necessarily (says he) be acknowledged, that  
“ the world had a beginning; otherways those things  
“ which are in their own nature corruptible, had ne-  
“ ver been able, from all eternity, to have held out a-  
“ gainst those forcible and violent assaults which in an  
“ infinite duration must have happened.” Nay, thus much Aristotle himself every where grants, that if the frame of the world be liable to dissolution, it must of necessity be acknowledged to have had a beginning.

These are some of the chief probabilities on our side; which, being taken together, and in their united force, have a great deal of conviction in them; especially if this be added, that there is no kind of positive proof so  
much

much as pretended on the other side. The utmost that Aristotle pretends to prove, is, that the world proceeded from God by the way of a natural and necessary effect, as light does from the sun. Which if it be true, as there is no tolerable ground for it; the world indeed would be without beginning, but not of itself. And thus I have done with the first consideration I propounded to speak to, *viz.* That there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other. I proceed therefore to the

2d consideration, That the most pressing difficulties are on that side on which there is no proof.

Those who deny a God, and hold the world to have been eternal, and of itself, have only two things to object against us: The difficulties that there are in the notion of a God, and in making the world of nothing. To the first I answer, That we attribute nothing to God that hath any repugnancy or contradiction in it. Power, wisdom, goodness, justice, and truth, have no repugnancy in them to our reason; because we own these perfections to be in some degree in ourselves, and therefore they may be in the highest degree that is possible in another. The eternity of God, and his immensity, and his being of himself, how difficult soever they may be to be conceived, yet these perfections must be granted to be somewhere; and therefore they may as well, nay much better, be ascribed to God, in whom we suppose all other perfections to meet, than to any thing else. And as for God's being a spirit; whatever difficulty there may be in conceiving the notion of a spirit, yet the Atheist must grant the thing, that there is a being or principle really distinct from matter; or else shew how mere matter; which is confessed by themselves to be void of sense and understanding, and to move necessarily, can produce any thing that has sense, understanding and liberty. As to the other difficulty, of making the world of nothing, I shall only say this, that though it signify an inconceivable excess of power, yet there can no contradiction be shewn in it. And it is every whit as easy to conceive, that something should be caused to be that was not before, as that any thing should be

be of itself; which yet must be granted on both sides; and therefore this difficulty ought not to be objected by either.

But then, on the other side, there are these two great and real difficulties. 1<sup>st</sup>, That men generally have always believed the contrary, *viz.* that the world had a beginning, and was made by God. Which is a strong evidence, that this account of the existence of the world is more natural, and of a more easy conception to human understanding. And indeed it is very natural to conceive, that every thing which is imperfect, (as the world, and all the creatures in it, must be acknowledged in many respects to be,) had some cause which produced it, such as it is, and determined the bounds and limits of its perfection; but that which is of itself, and without a cause, may be any thing, and have any perfection which does not imply a contradiction. 2<sup>dly</sup>, To assert mankind to have been of itself, and without a cause, hath this invincible objection against it, that we plainly see every man to be from another. So that mankind is asserted to have no cause of its being, and yet every particular man must be acknowledged to have a father; which is every whit as absurd in an infinite succession of men, as in any finite number of generations. It is more easy indeed to conceive, how a constant and permanent being, suppose matter, should always have been of itself; and then that that should be the foundation of infinite successive changes and alterations; but an infinite succession of the generations of men without any permanent foundation, is utterly unimaginable. If it be said, that the earth was always, and in time did produce men, and that they ever since have produced one another; this is to run into one great absurdity of the Epicurean way, which shall be considered in its proper place.

And thus I have endeavoured, as plainly and briefly as the nature of the argument would admit, to prove, that the account which the scripture gives of the existence of the world, is most credible, and agreeable to the reason of mankind; and that this first account which the Atheist gives of it, is altogether incredible. And now I expect, after all this, the Atheist will complain, that all that hath been said does not amount to a strict demonstration



stration of the thing. It may be so. And if the Atheist would undertake to demonstrate the contrary, there might be some reason for this complaint. In the mean time I desire to know, whether, when both sides are agreed that the world is, and that it must either have its original from God, or have been always of itself; and if it have been made evident, that on one side there are fair proofs both from testimony and reason, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of, and no pretence of proof on the other; and that the difficulties are most pressing on that side which is destitute of proof: I say, if this have been made evident, I desire to know whether this be not upon the matter as satisfactory to a wise man as a demonstration? For in this case there can be no doubt on which side the clear advantage of evidence lies, and consequently which way a prudent man ought to determine his assent.

I come now, in the *second* place, to consider the other account, which another sort of Atheists, those whom I call the *Epicureans*, do give of the existence of the world. And it is this. They suppose the matter of which the world is constituted to be eternal, and of itself, and then an infinite empty space for the infinite little parts of this matter (which they call *atoms*) to move and play in: and that these being always in motion, did, after infinite trials and encounters, without any counsel or design, and without the disposal and contrivance of any wise and intelligent being, at last, by a lucky casualty, entangle and settle themselves in this beautiful and regular frame of the world which we now see; and that the earth, being at first in its full vigour and fruitfulness, did then bring forth men, and all other sorts of living creatures, as it does plants now.

This is in short the Epicurean account of the original of the world; which, as absurd as it is, Lucretius, *l. 5.* hath very elegantly expressed in these verses,

*Sed quibus ille modis conjectus materiai,  
Fundarit cælum ac terram, pontique profunda,  
Solisque et lunæ cursus, ex ordine ponam.  
Nam certè neque consilio primordia rerum,  
Ordine se quæque, atque sagaci mente locârunt,*



*Nee quos quæque darent motus pepigere profecto:  
 Sed quia multa modis multis primordia rerum  
 Ex infinito jam tempore percita plagis,  
 Ponderibusque suis consuêrunt concita ferri,  
 Omnimodisque coire, atque omnia pertentare,  
 Quæcunque inter se possent congressa creare:  
 Propterea fit, uti magnum vulgata per ævum  
 Omnigenos cætus, et motus experiundo,  
 Tandem ea conveniant, quæ ut convenere, repente  
 Magnarum rerum fiunt exordia sæpe,  
 Terrai, maris, et cæli, generisque animantium.*

Thus he like a good poet, but a very bad maker and contriver of the world. For I appeal to any man of reason, whether any thing can be more unreasonable, than obstinately to impute an effect to chance which carries in the very face of it all the arguments and characters of a wise design and contrivance? Was ever any considerable work, in which there was required a great variety of parts, and a regular and orderly disposition of those parts, done by chance? Will chance fit means to ends, and that in ten thousand instances, and not fail in any one? How often might a man, after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground before they would fall into an exact poem, yea or so much as make a good discourse in prose; and may not a little book be as easily made by chance, as this great volume of the world? How long might a man be in sprinkling colours upon canvas with a careless hand, before they would happen to make the exact picture of a man? and is a man easier made by chance than his picture? How long might twenty thousand blind men, which should be sent out from the several remote parts of England, wander up and down, before they would all meet upon Salisbury-plains, and fall into rank and file in the exact order of an army? And yet this is much more easy to be imagined, than how the innumerable blind parts of matter should rendezvous themselves into a world. A man that sees Henry VII's chapel at Westminster, might with as good reason maintain, (yea with much better, considering the vast difference between that little structure and the huge fabrick of the world,) that it was  
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never contrived nor built by any man, but that the stones did by chance grow into those curious figures into which they seem to have been cut and graven; and that, *upon a time*, (as tales usually begin), the materials of that building, the stone, mortar, timber, iron, lead; and glass, happily met together, and very fortunately ranged themselves into that delicate order in which we see them now so close compacted, that it must be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man that should advance such an opinion as this, and write a book for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad: but yet with a little more reason than any man can have to say, that the world was made by chance, or that the first men grew up out of the earth as plants do now. For can any thing be more ridiculous and against all reason, than to ascribe the production of men to the first fruitfulness of the earth, without so much as one instance and experiment in any age or history to countenance so monstrous a supposition? The thing is at first sight so gross and palpable, that no discourse about it can make it more apparent. And yet these shameful beggars of principles, who give this precarious account of the original of things, assume to themselves to be the men of reason, the great wits of the world, the only cautious and wary persons that hate to be imposed upon; that must have convincing evidence for every thing, and can admit of nothing without a clear demonstration for it.

II. Speculative Atheism is unreasonable, because it gives no reasonable account of the universal consent of mankind in this apprehension, That there is a God. That men do generally believe a God, and have done in all ages, the present experience of the world, and the records of former times, do abundantly testify. Now, how comes this persuasion to have gained so universal a possession of the mind of man, and to have found such general entertainment in all nations, even those that are most barbarous? If there be no such thing as God in the world, how comes it to pass that this object doth continually encounter our understandings? whence is it that we are so perpetually haunted with the apparition of a Deity, and followed with it where-ever we go? If  
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it be not natural to the mind of man, but proceeds from some accidental distemper of our understandings, how comes it to be so universal, that no differences of age, or temper, or education, can wear it out, and set any considerable number of men free from it? Into what can we resolve this strong inclination of mankind to this error and mistake? How come all nations to be thus seduced? It is altogether unimaginable, but that the reason of so universal a consent in all places and ages of the world, and among all differences of persons, should be one and constant. But no one and constant reason of this can be given, but from the nature of man's mind and understanding, which hath this notion of a Deity born with it, and stamped upon it; or, which is all one, is of such a frame, that, in the free use and exercise of itself, it will find out God. And what more reasonable than to think, that if we be God's workmanship, he should set this mark of himself upon all reasonable creatures, that they may know to whom they belong, and may acknowledge the author of their beings? This seems to be a credible and satisfactory account of so universal a consent in this matter. But now what doth the Atheist resolve this into? He is not at one with himself what account to give of it: nor can it be expected he should; for he that will overlook the true reason of a thing, which usually is but one, may easily find many false ones, error being infinite. But there are three which he principally relies upon; fear, tradition, and policy of state. I shall briefly consider these.

*1st*, He would make us believe, that this apprehension of a God doth spring from an infinite jealousy in the mind of man, and an endless fear of the worst that may happen; according to that divine saying of the poet, which he can never sufficiently admire,

*Primum in orbe deos fecit timor, —*

“Fear first made Gods.” So that it is granted on both sides that the fear of a Deity doth universally possess the minds of men. Now, the question is, Whether it be more likely, that the existence of a God should be the cause of this fear, or that this fear should be the cause why men imagine there is a God? If there be a God who hath im-

pressed this image of himself upon the mind of man, there is great reason why all men should stand in awe of him. But if there be no God, it is not easy to conceive how fear should create an universal confidence and assurance in men that there is one. For, whence should this fear come? It must be either from without, from the suggestion of others, who first tell us there is such a being, and then our fear believes it; or else it must arise from within, from the nature of man, which is apt to fancy dreadful and terrible things. If from the suggestion of others who tell us so, the question returns, Who told them so? and will never be satisfied, till the first author of this report be found out. So that this account of fear resolves itself into tradition; which shall be spoken to in its proper place. But if it be said, that this fear arises from within, from the nature of man, which is apt to imagine dreadful things, this likewise is liable to inexplicable difficulties. For, *first*, The proper object of fear, is something that is dreadful; that is, something that threatens men with harm or danger; and that in God must either be power or justice: and such an object as this fear indeed may create. But goodness and mercy are essential to the notion of a God, as well as power and justice. Now, how should fear put men upon fancying a being that is infinitely good and merciful? No man hath reason to be afraid of such a being, as such. So that the Atheist must join another cause to fear, *viz.* hope, to enable men to create this imagination of a God. And what would the product of these two contrary passions be? the imagination of a being which we should fear would do us as much harm, as we could hope it would do us good? which would be *quid pro quo*, and which our reason would oblige us to lay aside so soon as we have fancied it, because it would signify just nothing. But, *secondly*, Suppose fear alone could do it, how comes the mind of man to be subject to such groundless and unreasonable fears? The Aristotelian Atheist will say, it always was so. But this is to affirm, and not to give any account of a thing. The Epicurean Atheist, if he will speak consonantly to himself, must say, that there happened, in the original constitution of the first men, such a contexture of atoms, as doth naturally dispose men

to these panick fears; unless he will say, that the first men, when they grew out of the earth, and afterwards broke loose from their root, finding themselves weak, and naked, and unarmed, and meeting with several fierce creatures stronger than themselves, they were put in such a fright, as did a little distemper their understandings, and let loose their imaginations to endless suspicions and unbounded jealousies, which did at last settle in the conceit of an invisible being, infinitely powerful, and able to do them harm; and being fully possessed with this apprehension, nothing being more ordinary than for crazed persons to believe their own fancies, they became religious; and afterwards when mankind began to be propagated in the way of generation, then religion obliged them to instil these principles into their children in their tender years, that so they might make the greater impression upon them; and this course having been continued ever since, the notion of a God hath been kept up in the world. This is very suitable to Epicurus's hypothesis of the original of men; but if any man think fit to say thus, I cannot think it fit to confute him. *Thirdly*, Whether men were from all eternity such timorous and fanciful creatures, or happened to be made so in the first constitution of things, it seems however that this fear of a Deity hath a foundation in nature. And if it be natural, ought we not rather to conclude, that there is some ground and reason for these fears, and that Nature hath not planted them in us to no purpose, than that they are vain and groundless. There is no principle that Aristotle, the great assenter of the eternity of the world, doth more frequently inculcate than this, That Nature doth nothing in vain: and the Atheist himself is forced to acknowledge, and so every man must who attentively considers the frame of the world, that although things were made by chance, yet they have happened as well as if the greatest wisdom had the ordering and contriving of them. And surely wisdom would never have planted such a vain principle as the fear of a Deity in the nature of man, if there had not been a God in the world.

*2dly*, If fear be not a sufficient account of this universal consent, the Atheist thinks it may very probably be

resolved into universal tradition. But this likewise is liable to great exception. For, whence came this tradition? It must begin sometime; it must have its original from some body; and it were well worth our knowing who that man was that first raised this spirit, which all the reason of mankind could never conjure down since. Where did he live, and when? In what country, and in what age of the world? *What was his name, or his son's name,* that we may know him? This the Atheist can give no punctual account of; only he imagines it not improbable, that some body long ago, (no body knows when), beyond the memory of all ages, did start such a notion in the world; and that it hath passed for current ever since. But if this tradition be granted so very ancient, as to have been before all books, and to be elder than any history, it may, for any thing any body can tell, have been from the beginning: and then it is much more likely to be a notion which was bred in the mind of man, and born with him, than a tradition transmitted from hand to hand through all generations; especially if we consider how many rude and barbarous nations there are in the world, which consent in the opinion of a God, and yet have scarce any certain tradition of anything that was done among them but two or three ages before.

3dly, But if neither of these be satisfactory, he hath one way more; which although it signify little to men of sober and severe reason, yet it very unhappily hits the jealous and suspicious humour of the generality of men, who, from the experience they have had of themselves and others, are very apt to suspect that every body, but especially their superiors and governors, have a design to impose upon them for their own ends. In short, it is this: That this noise about a God is a mere state-engine, and a politick device, invented at first by some great prince, or minister of state, to keep people in awe and order. And if so, from hence (saith the Atheist) we may easily apprehend, how from such an original it might be generally propagated, and become universally current, having the stamp of publick authority upon it: besides, that people have always been found easy to comply with the inclinations of their prince. And from hence like-

wise we may see the reason why this notion hath continued so long. For being found by experience to be so excellent an instrument of government, we may be sure it would always be cherished and kept up.

And now he triumphs, and thinks the business is very clear. Thus it was, some time or other, (most probably towards the beginning of the world, if it had a beginning, when all mankind was under one universal monarch), some great Nebuchadnezzar set up this image of a Deity, and commanded *all people and nations to fall down and worship it*. And this being found a successful device to awe people into obedience to government, it hath been continued to this day, and is like to last to the end of the world. To this fine conjecture I have these four things to say:

1. That all this is mere conjecture and supposition: he cannot bring the least shadow of proof or evidence for any one title of it.

2. This supposition grants the opinion of a God to conduce very much to the support of government and order in the world; and consequently to be very beneficial to mankind. So that the Atheist cannot but acknowledge, that it is great pity that it should not be true; and that it is the common interest of mankind, if there were but probable arguments for it, not to admit of any slight reasons against it; and to punish all those who would seduce men to Atheism, as the great disturbers of the world, and pests of human society.

3. This supposition can have nothing of certainty in it, unless this be true, that whoever makes a politick advantage of other mens principles, ought to be presumed to contrive those principles into them: whereas it is much more common, because more easy, for men to serve their own ends of those principles or opinions which they do not put into men, but find there. So that if the question of a God were to be decided by the probability of this conjecture, (which the Atheist applauds himself most in), it would be concluded in the affirmative; it being much more likely, since politicians reap the advantages of obedience and a more ready submission to government, from mens believing that there is a God, that they found the minds of men prepossessed



to their hands with the notion of a God, than that they planted it there.

4. We have as much evidence of the contrary to this supposition, as such a thing is capable of, *viz.* that it was not an *arcanum imperii*, a *secret of government*, to propagate the belief of a God among the people, when the governors themselves knew it to be a cheat. For we find, in the histories of all ages of which we have any records, (and of other ages we cannot possibly judge), that princes have not been more secure from troubles of conscience, and the fears of religion, and the terrors of another world, (nay many of them more subject to these) than other men; as I could give many instances, and those no mean ones. What made Caligula creep under the bed when it thundered? What made Tiberius, that great master of the crafts of government, complain so much of the grievous stings and lashes he felt in his conscience? What made Cardinal Wolsey, that great minister of state in our own nation, to pour forth his soul in those sad words: "Had I been as diligent to please my God, as I have been to please my King, he would not have forsaken me now in my grey hairs?" What reason for such actions and speeches, if these great men had known that religion was but a cheat? But if they knew nothing of this secret, I think we may safely conclude, that the notion of a God did not come from the court; that it was not the invention of politicians, and a juggle of state, to cozen the people into obedience.

And now, from all this that hath been said, it seems to be very evident, that the general consent of mankind in this apprehension, that there is a God, must in all reason be ascribed to some more certain and universal cause than fear, or tradition, or state-policy, *viz.* to this, that God himself hath wrought this image of himself upon the mind of man, and so woven it into the very frame of his being, that, like Phidias's picture in Minerva's shield, it can never totally be defaced, without the ruin of human nature.

I know but one objection that this discourse is liable to; which is this, That the universal consent of mankind in the apprehension of a God, is no more an argument that he really is, than the general agreement of so many nations,



nations, for so many ages, in the worship of many gods, is an argument that there are many.

To this I answer, 1. That the generality of the philosophers, and wise men of all nations and ages, did dissent from the multitude in these things. They believed but one supreme Deity, which, with respect to the various benefits men received from him, had several titles bestowed upon him. And although they did servilely comply with the people in worshipping God by sensible images and representations; yet it appears by their writings, that they despised this way of worship, as superstitious, and unsuitable to the nature of God. So that polytheism and idolatry are far from being able to pretend to univereal consent, from their having had the vote of the multitude in most nations for several ages together; because the opinion of the vulgar, separated from the consent and approbation of the wise, signifies no more than a great many cyphers would do without figures.

2. The gross ignorance and mistakes of the Heathens about God and his worship, are a good argument that there is a God; because they shew that men, sunk into the most degenerate condition, into the greatest blindness and darkness imaginable, do yet retain some sense and awe of a Deity; that religion is a property of our natures; and that the notion of a Deity is intimate to our understandings, and sticks close to them, seeing men will rather have any God than none; and rather than want a Deity, they will worship any thing.

3. That there have been so many false gods devised, is rather an argument that there is a true one, than that there is none. There would be no counterfeits but for the sake of something that is real. For though all pretenders seem to be what they really are not, yet they pretend to be something that really is: for to counterfeit, is to put on the likeness and appearance of some real excellency. There would be no brass money, if there were not good and lawful money. Bristol Stones would not pretend to be diamonds, if there never had been any diamonds. Those idols, in Henry VII's time, (as Sir Francis Bacon calls them); Lambert Symnel, and Perkin Warbeck, had never been set up, if there had not once been a real Plantagenet and Duke of York. So the idols

of the Heathen, though they be set up in affront to the true God; yet they rather prove that there is one, than the contrary.

III. Speculative Atheism is absurd, because it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. Aristotle hath long since well observed, how unreasonable it is to expect the same kind of proof and evidence for every thing, which we have for some things. Mathematical things, being of an abstracted nature, are capable of the clearest and strictest demonstration: but conclusions in natural philosophy, are capable of proof by an induction of experiments; things of a moral nature, by moral arguments; and matters of fact, by credible testimony. And though none of these be capable of that strict kind of demonstration which mathematical matters are; yet have we an undoubted assurance of them, when they are proved by the best arguments that things of that kind will bear. No man can demonstrate to me, unless we will call every argument that is fit to convince a wise man a demonstration, that there is such an island in America as Jamaica: yet, upon the testimony of credible persons who have seen it, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as I am from doubting of the clearest mathematical demonstration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle, by all those who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, That when any thing, in any of these kinds, is proved by as good arguments as a thing of that kind is capable of. and we have as great assurance that it is, as we could possibly have supposing it were, we ought not in reason to make any doubt of the existence of that thing.

Now to apply this to the present case: The being of a God is not mathematically demonstrable; nor can it be expected it should, because only mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be proved immediately by sense; because God being supposed to be a pure spirit, cannot be the object of any corporeal sense. But yet we have as great assurance that there is a God, as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of, and as we could in reason expect to have, supposing that he were. For, let us suppose there were such a being as an  
infinite

infinite spirit, clothed with all possible perfection; that is, as good, and wise and powerful, &c. as can be imagined: what conceivable ways are there whereby we should come to be assured that there is such a being, but either by an internal impression of the notion of a God upon our minds, or else by such external and visible effects, as our reason tells us must be attributed to some cause, and which we cannot, without great violence to our understandings, attribute to any other cause, but such a being as we conceive God to be, that is, one that is infinitely good, and wise, and powerful? Now we have double assurance that there is a God; and greater or other than this the thing is not capable of. If God should assume a body, and present himself before our eyes, this might amaze us, but could not give us any rational assurance that there is an infinite spirit. If he should work a miracle, this could not in reason convince an Atheist, more than the argument he already hath for it. If the Atheist were to ask a sign in the heaven above, or in the earth beneath, what could he desire God to do for his conviction more than he hath already done? Could he desire him to work a greater miracle than to make a world? Why, if God should carry this perverse man out of the limits of this world, and shew him a new heaven and a new earth spring out of nothing, he might say, that innumerable parts of matter chanced just then to rally together, and to form themselves into this new world; and that God did not make it. Thus you see, that we have all this rational assurance of a God that the thing is capable of; and that Atheism is absurd and unreasonable in requiring more.

IV. The Atheist is unreasonable, because he pretends to know that which no man can know, and to be certain of that which no body can be certain of; that is, that there is no God; and, which is consequent upon this, as I shall shew afterwards, that it is not possible there should be one. And the Atheist must pretend to know this certainly: for it were the greatest folly in the world for a man to deny and despise a God, if he be not certain that he is not. Now, whoever pretends to be certain that there is no God, hath this great disadvantage, he pretends to be certain of a pure negative. But  
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of negatives we have far the least certainty; and they are usually hardest, and many times impossible to be proved. Indeed such negatives as only deny some particular mode or manner of a thing's existence, a man may have a certainty of them; because, when we see things to be, we may see what they are, and in what manner they do, or do not exist. For instance: We may be certain that man is not a creature that hath wings; because this only concerns the manner of his existence; and we seeing what he is, may certainly know that he is not so or so. But pure negatives, that is, such as absolutely deny the existence of things, or the possibility of their existence, can never be proved: for after all that can be said against a thing, this will still be true, that many things possibly are which we know not of, and that many more things may be than are; and, if so, after all our arguments against a thing, it will be uncertain whether it be or not. And this is universally true, unless the thing denied to be, do plainly imply a contradiction; from which I have already shewn the notion of a God to be free. Now the Atheist pretends to be certain of a pure negative; that there is no such being as God, and that it is not possible there should be: but no man can reasonably pretend to know this much, but he must pretend to know all things that are or can be; which, if any man should be so vain as pretend to, yet it is to be hoped that no body would be so weak as to believe him.

V. Speculative Atheism is unreasonable, because it contradicts itself. There is this great contradiction in the denial of a God: He that denies a God, says that that is impossible which yet he must grant to be possible. He says it is impossible that there should be such a being as God, in saying that *de facto* there is no such being. For, eternity being essential to the notion of a God, if there be not a God already, it is impossible now that there should be one; because such a being as is supposed to be essentially eternal, and without beginning, cannot now begin to be. And yet he must grant it possible that there should be such a being; because it is possible there should be such a being as hath all possible perfection: and such a being as this is that which we call *God*, and is that very thing which the Atheist denies, and others affirm to

be. For he that denies a God, must deny such a being as all the world describe God to be; and this is the general notion which all men have of God, that he is a being as perfect as is possible; that is, endued with all such perfections as do not imply a contradiction; which none of those perfections which we attribute to God do, as I have already proved.

Secondly, Speculative Atheism, as it is unreasonable, so is it a most imprudent and uncomfortable opinion; and that upon these two accounts: 1<sup>st</sup>, Because it is against the present interest and happiness of mankind; 2<sup>dly</sup>, Because it is infinitely hazardous and unsafe in the issue.

1. It is against the present interest and happiness of mankind. If Atheism were the general opinion of the world, it would be infinitely prejudicial to the peace and happiness of human society, and would open a wide door to all manner of confusion and disorder. But this I shall not now insist upon, because I design a particular discourse of that by itself.

I shall at present content myself to shew how uncomfortable an opinion this would be to particular persons. For nothing can be more evident than that man is not sufficient of himself to his own happiness. He is liable to many evils and miseries which he can neither prevent nor redress. He is full of wants, which he cannot supply; and compassed about with infirmities, which he cannot remove; and obnoxious to dangers, which he can never sufficiently provide against. Consider man without the protection and conduct of a superior being, and he is secure of nothing that he enjoys in this world, and uncertain of every thing that he hopes for. He is apt to grieve for what he cannot help, and eagerly to desire what he is never likely to obtain. *Man walketh in vain shew, and disquieteth himself in vain.* He courts happiness in a thousand shapes, and the faster he pursues it, the faster it flies from him. His hopes and expectations are bigger than his enjoyments, and his fears and jealousies more troublesome than the evils themselves which he is so much afraid of. He is liable to a great many inconveniencies every moment of his life, and is continually insecure, not only of the good things of this life,

life, but even of life itself. And besides all this, after all his endeavours to the contrary, he finds himself naturally to dread a superior being that can defeat all his designs, and disappoint all his hopes, and make him miserable beyond all his fears. He has oftentimes secret misgivings concerning another life after this, and fearful apprehensions of an invisible judge; and thereupon he is full of anxiety concerning his condition in another world, and sometimes plunged into that anguish and despair, that he grows weary of himself. So that the Atheist deprives himself of all the comfort that the apprehensions of a God can give a man, and yet is liable to all the trouble and disquiet of those apprehensions.

I do not say that these inconveniencies do happen to all; but every one is in danger of them. For man's nature is evidently so contrived, as does plainly discover how unable he is to make himself happy: so that he must necessarily look abroad, and seek for happiness somewhere else. And if there be no superior being, in whose care of him he may repose his confidence, and quiet his mind; if he have no comfortable expectations of another life to sustain him under the evils and calamities he is liable to in this world, he is certainly *of all creatures the most miserable*. There are none of us but may happen to fall into those circumstances of danger, or want, or pain, or some other sort of calamity, that we can have no hopes of relief or comfort but from God alone; none in all the world to fly to but him. And what would men do in such a case if it were not for God? Human nature is most certainly liable to desperate exigencies, and he is not happy that is not provided against the worst that may happen. It is bad to be reduced to such a condition as to be destitute of all comfort. And yet men are many times brought to that extremity, that if it were not for God, they would not know what to do with themselves, or how to enjoy themselves for one hour, or to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable considerations under their present anguish and sufferings. All men naturally fly to God in extremity; and the most Atheistical person in the world, when he is forsaken of all hopes of any other relief, is forced to acknowledge him; and would be glad to have such a friend.

Can it then be a wise and reasonable design, to endeavour to banish the belief of a God out of the world? Not to say how impious it is in respect of God, nothing can be more malicious to men, and more effectually undermine the only foundation of our happiness. For if there were no God in the world, man would be in a much more wretched and disconsolate condition than the creatures below him: for they are only sensible of present pain; and, when it is upon them, they bear it as they can. But they are not at all apprehensive of evils at a distance, nor tormented with the fearful prospect of what may befall them hereafter: nor are they plunged into despair, upon the consideration that the evils they lie under are like to continue, and are incapable of a remedy. And as they have no apprehension of these things, so they need no comfort against them. But mankind is liable to all the same evils, and many others; which are so much the greater, because they are aggravated, and set on by the restless workings of our mind, and exasperated by the smart reflexions and frettings of our own thoughts. And if there be no God, we are wholly without comfort under all these, and without any other remedy than what time will give. For, if the providence of God be taken away, what security have we against those innumerable dangers and mischiefs to which human nature is continually exposed? what consolation under them, when we are reduced to that condition that no creature can give us any hopes of relief? but if we believe that there is a God that takes care of us, and we be careful to please him, this cannot but be a mighty comfort to us, both under the present sense of affliction, and the apprehension of evils at a distance. For in that case we are secure of one of these three things; either that God by his providence will prevent the evils we fear, if that be best for us; or that he will support us under them when they are present, and add to our strength as he increaseth our burden; or that he will make them the occasion of a greater good to us, by turning them either to our advantage in this world, or the increase of our happiness in the next. Now, every one of these considerations has a great deal of comfort in it; for which, if there were no God, there could be no ground: nay, on the contrary,



the most real foundation of our unhappiness would be laid in our reason; and we should be so much more miserable than the beasts, by how much we have a quicker apprehension and a deeper consideration of things.

So that, if a man had arguments sufficient to persuade him that there is no God, as there is infinite reason to the contrary; yet the belief of a God is so necessary to the comfort and happiness of our lives, that a wise man could not but be heartily troubled to quit so pleasant an error, and to part with a delusion which is apt to yield such unspeakable satisfaction to the mind of man. Did but men consider the true notion of God, he would appear to be so lovely a being, and so full of goodness, and of all desirable perfections, that even those very persons who are of such irregular understandings as not to believe that there is a God, yet could not, if they understood themselves, refrain from wishing with all their hearts that there were one. For is it not really desirable to every man, that there should be such a being in the world as takes care of the frame of it, that it do not run into confusion, and in that disorder ruin mankind; that there should be such a being, as takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good; as understands all our wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greatest straits, when nothing else can; to preserve us in our greatest dangers, to assist us against our worst enemies, and to comfort us under our sharpest sufferings, when all other things set themselves against us? Is it not every man's interest, that there should be such a governor of the world, as really designs our happiness, and hath omitted nothing that is necessary to it; as would govern us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us for the doing of that which is best for ourselves? that will punish any man that should go about to injure us, or to deal otherways with us than himself in the like case would be dealt withal by us? in a word, such a one as is ready to be reconciled to us when we have offended him; and is so far from taking little advantages against us for every failing, that he is willing to pardon our most wilful miscarriages upon our repentance and amendment?

And

And we have reason to believe God to be such a being, if he be at all.

Why then should any man be troubled that there is such a being as this, or think himself concerned to shut him out of the world? How could such a governor as this be wanting in the world, that is so great a comfort and security to mankind, and *the confidence of all the ends of the earth*? If God be such a being as I have described, woe to the world if it were without him. This would be a thousand times greater loss to mankind, and of more dismal consequence, and, if it were true, ought to affect us with more grief and horror, than the extinguishing of the sun.

Let but all things be well considered; and I am very confident, that if a wise and considerate man were left to himself and his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself he could devise; after he had searched heaven and earth, the sum of all his wishes would be this, That there were just such a being as God is: nor would he chuse any other benefactor, or friend, or protector for himself, or governor for the whole world, than infinite power, conducted and managed by infinite wisdom, and goodness, and justice; which is the true notion of a God.

Nay, so necessary is God to the happiness of mankind, that though there were no God; yet the Atheist himself, upon second thoughts, would judge it convenient that the generality of men should believe that there is one. For when the Atheist had attained his end, and, if it were a thing possible, had blotted the notion of a God out of the minds of men, mankind would, in all probability, grow so melancholy, and so unruly a thing, that he himself would think it fit in policy to contribute his best endeavours to the restoring of men to their former belief. Thus hath God secured the belief of himself in the world against all attempts to the contrary; not only by rivetting the notion of himself into our natures, but likewise by making the belief of his being necessary to the peace and tranquillity of our minds, and to the quiet and happiness of human society.

So that, if we consult our reason, we cannot but believe that there is; if our interest, we cannot but heartily wish that there were such a being as God in the world.

will be less needful to speak of the other two principles of religion, the immortality of the soul, and future rewards. For no man can have any reasonable scruple about these who believe that there is a God; because no man that owns the existence of an infinite spirit, can doubt of the possibility of a finite spirit; that is, such a thing as is immaterial, and does not contain any principle of corruption in itself. And there is no man that believes the goodness of God, but must be inclined to think, that he hath made some things for as long a duration as they are capable of. Nor can any man, that acknowledgeth the holy and just providence of God, and that he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity, and that he is a magistrate and governor of the world, and consequently concerned to countenance the obedience, and to punish the violation of his laws; and that does withal consider the promiscuous dispensations many times of God's providence in this world: I say, no man that acknowledges all this, can think it unreasonable to conclude, that after this life good men shall be rewarded, and sinners punished. I have done with the first sort of irreligious persons, the speculative Atheist. I shall speak but briefly of the other.

Secondly, The *practical* Atheist, who is wicked and irreligious, notwithstanding he does in some sort believe that there is a God, and a future state, he is likewise guilty of prodigious folly. The principle of the speculative Atheist argues more ignorance, but the practice of the other argues greater folly. Not to believe a God, and another life, for which there is so much evidence of reason, is great ignorance and folly: but it is the highest madness, when a man does believe these things, to live as if he did not believe them; when a man does not doubt but that there is a God, and that according as he deems himself towards him he will make him happy or miserable for ever, yet to live as if he were certain of the contrary, and as no man in reason can live but he that is well assured that there is no God. It was a shrewd saying of the old monk, That two kind of prisons would serve for all offenders in the world; an inquisition, and a bedlam: if any man should deny the being of a God, and the immortality of the soul, such a one should be put into the first of these, the inquisition,

as being a desperate heretick; but if any man should profess to believe these things, and yet allow himself in any known wickedness, such a one should be put into bedlam; because there cannot be a greater folly and madness, than for a man in matters of greatest moment and concernment to act against his best reason and understanding, and by his life to contradict his belief. Such a man does perish with his eyes open, and knowingly undoes himself: he runs upon the greatest dangers which he clearly sees to be before him, and precipitates himself into those evils which he professes to believe to be real and intolerable; and wilfully neglects the obtaining of that unspeakable good and happiness which he is persuaded is certain and attainable. Thus much for the second way of confirmation.

*Thirdly,* The third way of confirmation shall be, by endeavouring to vindicate religion from those common imputations which seem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence. And they are chiefly these three.

1. Credulity.
2. Singularity.
3. Making a foolish bargain.

**I. Credulity.** Say they, The foundation of religion is the belief of those things for which we have no sufficient reason, and consequently of which we can have no good assurance; as, the belief of a God, and of a future state after this life; things which we never saw, nor did experience, nor ever spoke with any body that did. Now, it seems to argue too great a forwardness and easiness of belief, to assent to any thing upon insufficient grounds.

To this I answer,

1. That if there be such a being as a God, and such a thing as a future state after this life, it cannot, as I said before, in reason be expected, that we should have the evidence of sense for such things: for he that believes a God, believes such a being as hath all perfections; among which this is one, that he is a spirit; and, consequently, that he is invisible, and cannot be seen. He likewise that believes another life after this, professeth to believe a state of which in this life we have no trial and experience. Besides, if this were a good objection, That no man ever saw these things, it strikes at the

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the Atheist as well as us: for no man ever saw the world to be from eternity; nor Epicurus his atoms, of which notwithstanding he believes the world was made.

2. We have the best evidence for these things which they are capable of at present, supposing they were.

3. Those who deny these principles, must be much more credulous; that is, believe things upon incomparable less evidence of reason. The Atheist looks upon all that are religious as a company of credulous fools: but he, for his part, pretends to be wiser than to believe any thing for company; he cannot entertain things upon those slight grounds which move other men; if you would win his assent to any thing, you must give him a clear demonstration for it. Now, there is no way to deal with this man of reason, this rigid exacter of strict demonstration for things which are not capable of it, but by shewing him, that he is an hundred times more credulous, that he begs more principles, takes more things for granted, without offering to prove them, and assents to more strange conclusions upon weaker grounds, than those whom he so much accuseth of credulity.

And, to evidence this, I shall briefly give you an account of the Atheist's creed, and present you with a catalogue of the fundamental articles of his faith. He believes that there is no God, nor possibly can be; and, consequently, that the wise, as well as the unwise, of all ages, have been mistaken, except himself, and a few more. He believes, that either all the world have been frightened with an apparition of their own fancy, or that they have most unnaturally conspired together to cozen themselves; or that this notion of a God is a trick of policy, though the greatest princes and politicians do not at this day know so much, nor have done time out of mind. He believes, either that the heavens, and the earth, and all things in them, had no original cause of their being, or else that they were made by chance, and happened, he knows not how, to be as they are; and that in this last shuffling of matter, all things have, by great good fortune, fallen out as happily and as regularly, as if the greatest wisdom had contrived them; but yet he is resolved to believe, that there was no wisdom in the contrivance of them. He believes, that matter of itself is  
utterly

utterly void of all sense, understanding, and liberty; but, for all that, he is of opinion, that the parts of matter may now and then happen to be so conveniently disposed, as to have all these qualities, and most dexterously to perform all these fine and free operations which the ignorant attribute to spirits.

This is the sum of his belief. And it is a wonder, that there should be found any person pretending to reason or wit that can assent to such a heap of absurdities; which are so gross and palpable that they may be felt. So that if every man had his due, it will certainly fall to the Atheist's share, to be the most credulous person; that is, to believe things upon the slightest reasons: for he does not pretend to prove any thing of all this; only he finds himself, he knows not why, inclined to believe so, and to laugh at those that do not.

II. The second imputation is, singularity; the affectation whereof is unbecoming a wise man. To this charge I answer,

1. If by *religion* be meant the belief of the principles of religion, That there is a God, and a providence; that our souls are immortal; and that there are rewards to be expected after this life: these are so far from being singular opinions, that they are and always have been the general opinion of mankind, even of the most barbarous nations; insomuch that the histories of ancient times do hardly furnish us with the names of above five or six persons who denied a God. And Lucretius acknowledgeth that Epicurus was the first who did oppose those great foundations of religion, the providence of God, and the immortality of the soul: *Primum Grajus homo, &c.* meaning Epicurus.

2. If by *religion* be meant a living up to those principles, that is, to act conformably to our best reason and understanding, and to live as it does become those who do believe a God and a future state; this is acknowledged, even by those who live otherwise, to be the part of every wise man, and the contrary to be the very madness of folly, and height of distraction; nothing being more ordinary, than for men who live wickedly to acknowledge that they ought to do otherwise.

3. Though, according to the common course and practice

practice of the world, it be somewhat singular for men truly and thoroughly to live up to the principles of their religion; yet singularity in this matter is so far from being a reflexion upon any man's prudence, that it is a singular commendation of it. In two cases singularity is very commendable.

1<sup>st</sup>, When there is a necessity of it in order to a man's greatest interest and happiness. I think it to be a reasonable account for any man to give, why he does not live as the greatest part of the world do, that he has no mind to die as they do, and to perish with them; he is not disposed to be a fool, and to be miserable for company; he has no inclination to have his last end like theirs *who know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son, and shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*

2<sup>dly</sup>, It is very commendable to be singular in any excellency; and I have shewn that religion is the greatest excellency. To be singular in any thing that is wise, and worthy, and excellent, is not a disparagement, but a praise. Every man would chuse to be thus singular.

III. The third imputation is, That religion is a foolish bargain; because they who are religious, hazard the parting with a present and certain happiness, for that which is future and uncertain.

To this I answer,

1. Let it be granted, that the assurance which we have of future rewards falls short of the evidence of sense. For I doubt not, but that saying of our Saviour, *Blessed is he who hath believed, and not seen*; and those expressions of the Apostle, *We walk by faith, and not by sight*, and, *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*, are intended by way of abatement and diminution to the evidence of faith; and do signify that the report and testimony of others, is not so great evidence as that of our own senses. And though we have sufficient assurance of another state; yet no man can think we have so great evidence, as if we ourselves had been in the other world, and seen how all things are there.

2. We have sufficient assurance of these things, and such as may beget in us a well-grounded confidence, and free us from all doubts of the contrary, and persuade a reasonable



reasonable man to venture his greatest interests in this world upon the security he hath of another. For,

*1st*, We have as much assurance of these things, as things future and at a distance are capable of; and he is a very unreasonable man that would desire more. Future and invisible things are not capable of the evidence of sense: but we have the greatest rational evidence for them; and in this every reasonable man ought to rest satisfied.

*2dly*, We have as much as is abundantly sufficient to justify every man's discretion, who, for the great and eternal things of another world, hazards, or parts with the poor and transitory things of this life. And, for the clearing of this, it will be worth our considering, that the greatest affairs of this world, and the most important concerns of this life, are all conducted only by moral demonstrations. Men every day venture their lives and estates only upon moral assurance. For instance: Men who were never at the East or West Indies, or in Turkey or Spain, yet do venture their whole estate in traffick thither, though they have no mathematical demonstration, but only moral assurance, that there are such places. Nay, which is more, men every day eat and drink, though I think no man can demonstrate, out of Euclid, or Apollonius, that his baker, or brewer, or cook, have not conveyed poison into his meat or drink. And that man that would be so wise and cautious, as not to eat or drink till he could demonstrate this to himself, I know no other remedy for him, but that in great gravity and wisdom he must die for fear of death. And for any man to urge, that though men in temporal affairs proceed upon moral assurance, yet there is greater assurance required to make men seek heaven and avoid hell, seems to me to be highly unreasonable. For such an assurance of things as will make men circumspect and careful to avoid a lesser danger, ought in all reason to awaken men much more to the avoiding of a greater: such an assurance as will sharpen mens desires and quicken their endeavours for the obtaining of a lesser good, ought in all reason to animate men more powerfully, and to inspire them with a greater vigour and industry in the pursuit of that which is infinitely greater.

For

For why the same assurance should not operate, as well in a great danger as in a less, in a great good as in a small and inconsiderable one, I can see no reason; unless men will say, that the greatness of an evil and danger is an encouragement to men to run upon it; and that the greatness of any good and happiness, ought in reason to dishearten men from the pursuit of it.

And now I think I may with reason intreat such as are Atheistically inclined, to consider these things seriously and impartially; and if there be weight in these considerations which I have offered to them to sway with reasonable men, I would beg of such, that they would not suffer themselves to be biassed by prejudice or passion, or the interest of any lust, or worldly advantage, to a contrary persuasion.

*First*, I would intreat them seriously and diligently to consider these things, because they are of so great moment and concernment to every man. If any thing in the world deserve our serious study and consideration, these principles of religion do. For what can import us more to be satisfied in, than whether there be a God, or not? whether our souls shall perish with our bodies, or be immortal, and shall continue for ever? and if so, whether in that eternal state which remains for men after this life, they shall not be happy or miserable for ever, according as they have demeaned themselves in this world? If these things be so, they are of infinite consequence to us; and therefore it highly concerns us, to inquire diligently about them, and to satisfy our minds concerning them one way or other. For these are not matters to be slightly and superficially thought upon; much less, as the way of Atheistical men is, to be played and jested withal. There is no greater argument of a light and inconsiderate person, than profanely to scoff at religion. It is a sign that that man hath no regard to himself, and that he is not touched with a sense of his own interest, who loves to be jesting with edged tools, and to play with life and death. This is the very madman that Solomon speaks of, *who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; and saith, Am I not in sport?* Prov. xxvi. 18. To examine severely and debate seriously the principles of religion, is a thing worthy of a wise man:

man: but if any man shall turn religion into raillery, and think to confute it by two or three bold jests, this man doth not render religion, but himself ridiculous, in the opinion of all considerate men; because he sports with his own life. If the principles of religion were doubtful and uncertain, yet they concern us so nearly, that we ought to be serious in the examination of them. And though they were never so clear and evident, yet they may be made ridiculous by vain and frothy men; as the gravest and wisest person in the world may be abused, by being put into a fool's coat, and the most noble and excellent poem may be debased, and made vile, by being turned into burlesque. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more largely in my next discourse.

So that it concerns every man, that would not trifle away his soul, and fool himself into irrecoverable misery, with the greatest seriousness to inquire into these matters, whether they be so or not, and patiently to consider the arguments which are brought for them. For many have miscarried about these things, not because there is not reason and evidence enough for them, but because they have not had patience enough to consider them.

*Secondly,* Consider these things impartially. All wicked men are of a party against religion. Some lust or interest engageth them against it. Hence it comes to pass, that they are apt to slight the strongest arguments that can be brought for it, and to cry up very weak ones against it. Men do generally, and without difficulty, assent to mathematical truths, because it is no body's interest to deny them: but men are slow to believe moral and divine truths, because by their lusts and interests they are prejudiced against them. And therefore you may observe, that the more virtuously any man lives, and the less he is enslaved to any lust, the more ready he is to entertain the principles of religion.

Therefore, when you are examining these matters, do not take into consideration any sensual or worldly interest, but deal clearly and impartially with yourselves. Let not temporal and little advantages sway you against a greater and more durable interest. Think thus with yourselves: That you have not the making of things true

or false; but that the truth and existence of things is already fixed, and settled; and that the principles of religion are already either determinately true or false before you think of them: either there is a God, or there is not; either your souls are immortal, or they are not; one of these is certain and necessary, and is not now to be altered. The truth of things will not comply with our conceits, and bend itself to our interests. Therefore do not think what you would have to be; but consider impartially what is, and, if it be, will be, whether you will or no. Do not reason thus: I would fain be wicked; and therefore it is my interest that there should be no God, nor no life after this; and therefore I will endeavour to prove that there is no such thing, and will shew all the favour I can to that side of the question: I will bend my understanding and wit to strengthen the negative, and will study to make it as true as I can. This is fond, because it is the way to cheat thyself; and that we may do as often as we please: but the nature of things will not be imposed upon. If then thou be as wise as thou oughtest to be, thou wilt reason thus with thyself: My highest interest is, not to be deceived about these matters; therefore, setting aside all other considerations, I will endeavour to know the truth, and yield to that.

And now it is time to draw towards a conclusion of this long discourse. And that which I have all this while been endeavouring to convince men of, and to persuade them to, is no other than what God himself doth particularly recommend to us as proper for human consideration: *Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.* Whoever pretends to reason, and calls himself a man, is obliged to acknowledge God, and to demean himself religiously towards him: for God is to the understanding of man, as the light of the sun is to our eyes, the first, and the plainest, and the most glorious object of it. He fills heaven and earth; and every thing in them doth represent him to us. Which way soever we turn ourselves, we are encountered with clear evidences and sensible demonstrations of a Deity: for (as the Apostle reasons) *the invisible things of him from the creation*

creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸς ἀναπολογήτης, so that they are without excuse, Rom. i. 20.; that is, those men that know not God, have no apology to make for themselves. Or, if men do know and believe that there is such a being as God, not to consider the proper consequences of such a principle, not to demean ourselves towards him, as becomes our relation to him, and dependence upon him, and the duty which we naturally owe him; this is great stupidity and inconsiderateness.

And yet he that considers the lives and actions of the greatest part of men, would verily think that they understood nothing of all this. Therefore the scripture represents wicked men as without understanding: *It is a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them*, Deut. xxxii. 28.; and elsewhere, *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* Psal. xiv. 4.; not that they are destitute of the natural faculty of understanding, but they do not use it as they ought: they are not blind, but they wink; *they detain the truth of God in unrighteousness; and though they know God, yet they do not glorify him as God, nor suffer the apprehensions of him to have a due influence upon their hearts and lives.*

Men generally stand very much upon the credit and reputation of their understandings, and, of all things in the world, hate to be accounted fools, because it is so great a reproach. The best way to avoid this imputation, and to bring off the credit of our understandings, is, to be truly religious; *to fear the Lord, and to depart from evil*. For certainly there is no such imprudent person, as he that neglects God, and his soul, and is careless and slothful about his everlasting concerns; because this man acts contrary to his truest reason, and best interest: he neglects his own safety, and is active to procure his own ruin: he flies from happiness, and runs away from it as fast as he can; but pursues misery, and makes haste to be undone. Hence it is that Solomon does all along in the Proverbs give the title of *fool* to a wicked man, as if it were his proper name, and the fittest character of him; because he is so eminently such. There is no fool to the sinner, who every moment ven-

tures his soul, and lays his everlasting interest at the stake. Every time a man provokes God, he does the greatest mischief to himself that can be imagined. A madman, that cuts himself, and tears his own flesh, and dashes his head against the stones, does not act so unreasonably as he; because he is not so sensible of what he does. Wickedness is a kind of voluntary frenzy, and a chosen distraction: and every sinner does wilder and more extravagant things, than any man can do that is crazed, and out of his wits; only with this sad difference, that he knows better what he does. For to them who believe another life after this, an eternal state of happiness or misery in another world, which is but a reasonable *postulatum* or demand among Christians, there is nothing in mathematicks more demonstrable than the folly of wicked men; for it is not a clearer and more evident principle, That the whole is greater than a part, than that eternity, and the concernments of it, are to be preferred before time.

I will therefore put the matter into a temporal case, that wicked men, who understand any thing of the rules and principles of worldly wisdom, may see the imprudence of an irreligious and sinful course, and be convinced, *that this their way is their folly, even themselves being judges.*

Is that man wise, as to his body, and his health, who only clothes his hands, but leaves his whole body naked; who provides only against the toothach, and neglects whole troops of mortal diseases that are ready to rush in upon him? Just thus does he who takes care only for this vile body, but neglects his precious and immortal soul; who is very solicitous to prevent small and temporal inconveniencies, but takes no care *to escape the damnation of hell.*

Is he a prudent man, as to his temporal estate, that lays designs only for a day, without any prospect to, or provision for the remaining part of his life? Even so does he that provides for the short time of this life, but takes no care for all eternity; which is to be wise for a moment, but a fool for ever; and to act as untowardly, and as crossly to the reason of things, as can be imagin-  
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ed; to regard time as if it were eternity, and to neglect eternity as if it were but a short time.

Do we count him a wise man, who is wise in any thing but in his own proper profession and employment; wise for every body but himself; who is ingenious to contrive his own misery, and to do himself a mischief, but is dull and stupid as to the designing of any real benefit and advantage to himself? Such a one is he, who is ingenious in his calling, but a bad Christian; for Christianity is more our proper calling and profession, than the very trades we live upon: and such is every sinner, who is *wise to do evil, but to do good hath no understanding.*

Is it wisdom in any man, to neglect and disoblige him who is his best friend, and can be his worst enemy? or with one weak troop, to go out to meet him that comes against him with thousands of thousands? to fly a small danger, and run upon a greater? Thus does every wicked man that neglects and contemns God, *who can save, or destroy him*; who strives with his maker, and provoketh the Lord to jealousy, and, with the small and inconsiderable forces of a man, takes the field against the mighty God, the Lord of hosts; who fears them that can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fears not him, who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell. And thus does he who, for fear of any thing in this world, ventures to displease God: for in so doing, he runs away from men, and falls into the hands of the living God; he flies from a temporal danger, and leaps into hell.

Is not he an imprudent man, who, in matters of greatest moment and concernment, neglects opportunities never to be retrieved; who standing upon the shore, and seeing the tide making haste towards him apace, and that he hath but a few minutes to save himself, yet will lay himself to sleep there, till the cruel sea rush in upon him, and overwhelm him? And is he any better, who trifles away this day of God's grace and patience, and foolishly adjourns the necessary work of repentance, and the weighty business of religion, to a dying hour?

And, to put an end to these questions, Is he wise who hopes to attain the end without the means, nay, by means that are quite contrary to it? Such is every wicked man,



who hopes to be blessed hereafter without being holy here, and to be happy, that is, to find a pleasure in the enjoyment of God, and in the company of holy spirits, by rendering himself as unsuitable and unlike to them as he can.

Wouldst thou then be truly wise? be wise for thyself, wise for thy soul, wise for eternity. Resolve upon a religious course of life. *hear God, and depart from evil.* Look beyond things present and sensible, unto things which are not seen, and are eternal. Labour to secure the great interests of another world, and refer all the actions of this short and dying life, to that state which will shortly begin, but never have an end: and this will approve itself to be wisdom at the last, whatever the world judge of it now. For not that which is approved of men now, but what shall finally be approved by God, is true wisdom; that which is esteemed so by him who is the fountain and original of all wisdom; the first rule and measure, the best and most competent judge of it.

I deny not, but that those that are wicked, and neglect religion, may think themselves wise, and may enjoy this their delusion for a while. But there is a time a-coming, when the most profane and Atheistical, who now account it a piece of gallantry, and an argument of a great spirit, and of a more than common wit and understanding, to slight God, and to baffle religion, and to level all the discourses of another world with the poetical descriptions of the Fairy-land; I say, there is a day a-coming, when all these witty fools shall be unhappily undeceived, and, not being able to enjoy their delusion any longer, shall call themselves fools for ever.

But why should I use so much importunity to persuade men to that which is so excellent, so useful, and so necessary? The thing itself hath allurements in it beyond all arguments: for, if religion be the best knowledge and wisdom, I cannot offer any thing beyond this to your understandings, to raise your esteem of it; I can present nothing beyond this to your affections, to excite your love and desire. All that can be done, is, to set the thing before men, and to offer it to their choice: and if mens natural desire of wisdom, and knowledge, and happiness, will not persuade them to be religious, it is in vain to use

use arguments; if the sight of these beauties will not charm mens affections, it is to no purpose to go about to compel a liking, and to urge and push forward a match, to the making whereof consent is necessary. Religion is matter of our freest choice; and if men will obstinately and wilfully set themselves against it, there is no remedy. *Pertinaciæ nullum remedium posuit Deus*, "God has provided no remedy for the obstinacy of men;" but if they will chuse to be fools, and to be miserable, he will leave them to inherit their own choice, and to enjoy the portion of sinners.

## S E R M O N II.

## The folly of scoffing at religion.

2 P E T. iii. 3.

*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.*

**K** Nowing this first. In the verse before, the Apostle was speaking of a famous prophecy, before the accomplishment of which this sort of men whom he calls *scoffers* should come: *That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of our Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, &c.*

The prophecy here spoken of, is probably that famous prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem which is in the Prophet Daniel, and before the fulfilling whereof our Saviour expressly tells us *false prophets should arise and deceive many*, Matth. xxiv. 11.

Now the *scoffers* here spoken of, are the *false teachers*, whom the Apostle had been describing all along in the foregoing chapter: *There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among*

mong you. These, he tells us, should proceed to that height of impiety, as to scoff at the principles of religion, and to deride the expectations of a future judgment: *In the last days shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?*

In speaking to these words, I shall do these three things.

1. Consider the nature of the sin here mentioned; which is, scoffing at religion.

2. The character of the persons that are charged with the guilt of this sin. They are said *to walk after their own lusts*.

3. I shall represent to you the heinousness and the aggravations of this vice.

I. We shall consider the nature of the sin here mentioned; which is, scoffing at religion: *There shall come scoffers*. These, it seems, were a sort of people that derided our Saviour's prediction of his coming to judge the world. So the Apostle tells us in the next words; that they said, *Where is the promise of his coming?*

In those times there was a common persuasion among Christians, *that the day of the Lord was at hand*, as the Apostle elsewhere tells us, *2. Thess. ii. 2*: Now this, it is probable, these scoffers twitted the Christians withal; and because Christ did not come when some looked for him, they concluded he would not come at all. Upon this they derided the Christians, as enduring persecution in a vain expectation of that which was never likely to happen. They saw all things continue *as they were from the beginning of the world*, notwithstanding the apprehensions of Christians concerning the approaching end of it: *For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the world. Since the fathers fell asleep, ἀφ' ἧς*, which may either be rendered *from the time*; or else, which seems more agreeable to the Atheistical discourse of these men, *saving (or except) that the fathers are fallen asleep, all things continue as they were*; saving that men die, and one generation succeeds another, they saw no change or alteration. They looked upon all things as going on in a constant course: one generation of men passed away, and another came in the room of it; but the world remained still as it was. And thus, for ought

ought they knew, things might hold on for ever. So that the principles of these men seem to be much the same with those of the Epicureans, who denied the providence of God, and the immortality of mens souls; and consequently a future judgment which should sentence men to rewards and punishments in another world. These great and fundamental principles of all religion, they derided, as the fancies and dreams of a company of melancholy men, who were weary of the world, and pleased themselves with vain conceits of happiness and ease in another life. But as for them, they believed none of these things; and therefore gave all manner of licence and indulgence to their lusts.

But this belongs to the second thing I propounded to speak to, namely,

II. The character which is here given of these scoffers: They are said to *walk after their own lusts*. And no wonder, if, when they denied a future judgment, they gave up themselves to all manner of sensuality.

St. Jude, in his epistle, gives much the same character of them that St. Peter here does, v. 18. 19. *There shall come in the last days mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts, sensual, not having the Spirit*. So that we see what kind of persons they are who profanely scoff at religion; men of sensual spirits, and of licentious lives. For this character which the Apostle here gives of the scoffers of that age, was not an accidental thing which happened to those persons; but is the constant character of them who deride religion, and flows from the very temper and disposition of those who are guilty of this impiety; it is both the usual preparation to it, and the natural consequent of it.

To deride God and religion, is the highest kind of impiety. And men do not usually arrive to this degree of wickedness at first, but they come to it by several steps. The Psalmist very elegantly expresseth to us the several gradations by which men at last come to this horrid degree of impiety: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*, Psal. i. 1. Men are usually first corrupted by bad counsel and company, which is called *walking in the counsel of the ungodly*;

next they habituate themselves to their vicious practices, which is *standing in the way of sinners*; and then at last they take up and settle in a contempt of all religion, which is called *sitting in the seat of the scornful*.

For when men once indulge themselves in wicked courses, the vicious inclinations of their minds sway their understandings, and make them apt to disbelieve those truths which contradict their lusts. Every inordinate lust and passion is a false bias upon mens understandings, which naturally draws towards Atheism, and when mens judgments are once biased, they do not believe according to the evidence of things, but according to their humour and their interest. For when men live as if there were no God, it becomes expedient for them that there should be none; and when they endeavour to persuade themselves so, and will be glad to find arguments to fortify themselves in this persuasion. Men of dissolute lives cry down religion, because they would not be under the restraints of it; they are loth to be tied up by the strict laws and rules of it: it is their interest, more than any reason they have against it, which makes them despise it; they hate it, because they are reprov'd by it. So our Saviour tells us, that *men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd,* John iii. 19. 20.

I remember it is the saying of one, who hath done more by his writings to debauch the age with Atheistical principles, than any man that lives in it, "That when reason is against a man, then a man will be against reason." I am sure this is the true account of such mens enmity to religion. Religion is against them, and therefore they set themselves against religion. The principles of religion, and the doctrines of the holy scriptures, are terrible enemies to wicked men; they are continually flying in their faces, and galling their consciences: and this is that which makes them kick against religion, and spurn at the doctrines of that holy book. And this may probably be one reason why many men, who are observed to be sufficiently dull in other matters, yet can talk profanely, and speak against religion, with some kind of salt and smartness; because religion is the thing that

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frets them: and as in other things, so in this, *vexatio dat intellectum*; the inward trouble and vexation of their minds gives them some kind of wit and sharpness in railing upon religion. Their consciences are galled by it, and this makes them winch and fling as if they had some mettle. For, let men pretend to what they will, there is no ease and comfort of mind to be had from Atheistical principles. It is found by experience, that none are more apprehensive of danger, or more fearful of death, than this sort of men: even when they are in prosperity, they ever and anon feel many inward stings and lashes; but when any great affliction or calamity overtakes them, they are the most poor-spirited creatures in the whole world.

The sum is: The true reason why any man is an Atheist, is, because he is a wicked man. Religion would curb him in his lusts, and therefore he casts it off, and puts all the scorn upon it he can. Besides, that men think it some kind of apology for their vices, that they do not act contrary to any principle they profess: their practice is agreeable to what they pretend to believe; and so they think to vindicate themselves, and their own practices, by laughing at those for fools who believe any thing to the contrary.

III. The third thing I propounded was, to represent to you the heinousness and the aggravations of this vice. and to make this out, we will make these three suppositions, which are as many as the thing will bear.

1. Suppose there were no God, and that the principles of religion were false.

2. Suppose the matter were doubtful, and the arguments equal on both sides.

3. Suppose it certain that there is a God, and that the principles of religion are true. Put the case how we will, I shall shew that the humour is intolerable.

1<sup>st</sup>, Suppose there were no God, and that the principle of religion were false. Not that there is any reason for such a supposition, but only to shew the unreasonableness of this humour. Put the case that these men were in the right, in denying the principles of religion, and that all that they pretend were true; yet so long as the generality of mankind believes the contrary, it is certainly

tainly a great rudeness, or incivility at least, to deride and scoff at these things. Indeed, upon this supposition, there could be no such thing as sin; but yet it would be a great offence against the laws of civil conversation. Suppose then the Atheist were wiser than all the world, and that he did, upon good grounds, know that all mankind, besides himself and two or three more, were mistaken about the matters of religion; yet, if he were either so wise or so civil as he should be, he would keep all this to himself, and not affront other men about these things.

I remember that that law which God gave to the people of Israel, *Thou shalt not speak evil of the rulers of thy people*, is rendered by Josephus in a very different sense, *What other nations account Gods, let no man blaspheme*. And this is not so different from the Hebrew, as at first sight one would imagine; for the same Hebrew word signifies both gods and rulers. But whether this be the meaning of that law or not, there is a great deal of reason in the thing. For though every man have a right to dispute against a false religion, and to urge it with all its absurd and ridiculous consequences, as the antient fathers did in their disputes with the Heathen; yet it is a barbarous incivility for any man scurrilously to make sport with that which others account religion, not with any design to convince their reason, but only to provoke their rage.

But now the Atheist can pretend no obligation of conscience why he should so much as dispute against the principles of religion, much less deride them. He that pretends to any religion, may pretend conscience for opposing a contrary religion; but he that denies all religion, can pretend no conscience for any thing. A man may be obliged indeed in reason and common humanity to free his neighbour from a hurtful error; but supposing there were no God, this notion of a Deity and the principles of religion have taken such deep root in the mind of man, that either they are not to be extinguished; or if they be, it would be no kindness to any man to endeavour it for him, because it is not to be done, but with so much trouble and violence, that the remedy would be worse than the disease.



For if this notion of a Deity be founded in a natural fear, it is in vain to attempt to expel it: for whatever violence may be offered to nature, by endeavouring to reason men into a contrary persuasion, nature will still recoil, and at last return to itself, and then the fear will be augmented from the apprehension of the dangerous consequences of such an impiety. So that nothing can create more trouble to a man, than to endeavour to dispossess him of this conceit; because nature is but irritated by the contest, and the man's fears will be doubled upon him.

But if we suppose this apprehension of a Deity to have no foundation in nature, but to have had its rise from tradition, which hath been confirmed in the world by the prejudice of education, the difficulty of removing it will almost be as great as if it were natural; that which men take in by education, being next to that which is natural. And if it could be extinguished, yet the advantage of it will not recompense the trouble of the cure: for, except the avoiding of persecution for religion, there is no advantage that the principles of Atheism, if they could be quietly settled in a man's mind, can give him. The advantage indeed that men make of them is, to give themselves the liberty to do what they please; to be more sensual and more unjust than other men; that is, they have the privilege to surfeit themselves and to be sicker of sin than other men, and to make mankind their enemy, by their unjust and dishonest actions; and, consequently, to live more uneasily in the world than other men.

So that the principles of religion, the belief of a God, and another life, by obliging men to be virtuous, do really promote their temporal happiness. And all the privilege that Atheism pretends to, is, to let men loose to vice; which is naturally attended with temporal inconveniencies. And if this be true, then the Atheist cannot pretend this reason of charity to mankind, which is the only one I can think of, to dispute against religion, much less to rally upon it. For it is plain, that it would be no kindness to any man to be undeceived in these principles of religion, supposing they were false: because the principles of religion are so far from hindering, that

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they promote a man's happiness even in this world : and as to the other world, there can be no inconvenience in the mistake ; for when a man is not, it will be no trouble to him that he was once deceived about these matters.

And where no obligation of conscience nor of reason can be pretended, there certainly the laws of civility ought to take place. Now men do profess to believe that there is a God, and that the common principles of religion are true, and to have a great veneration for these things : can there then be a greater insolence, than for a man, when he comes into company, to rally and fall foul upon those things for which he knows the company have a reverence ? Can one man offer a greater affront to another, than to expose to scorn him whom he owns and declares to be his best friend, the patron of his life, and the greatest benefactor he hath in the world : and doth not every man that owns a God say this of him ?

But when the generality of mankind are of the same opinion, the rudeness is still the greater. So that, who ever doth openly contemn God and religion, does *delinquere in majestatem populæ, & humani generis* : " He does offend against the majesty of the people, and that reverence which is due to the common apprehension of mankind, whether they be true or not ;" which is the greatest incivility that can be imagined.

This is the first consideration, and it is the least that I have to urge in this matter : but yet I have insisted the longer upon it ; because it is such a one as ought especially to prevail upon those who, I am afraid, are too often guilty of this vice ; I mean those who are of better breeding, because they pretend to understand the laws of behaviour, and the decencies of conversation, better than other men.

2dly, Supposing it were doubtful, whether there be God or not, and whether the principles of religion were true or not, and that the arguments were equal on both sides ; yet it would be a great folly to deride these things. And here I suppose as much as the Atheist can, with any colour of reason, pretend to. For no man ever yet pretended to demonstrate, that there is no God, nor no

after this: for these being pure negatives, are capable of no proof, unless a man could shew them to be plainly impossible. The utmost that is pretended is, that the arguments that are brought for these things are not sufficient to convince. But if they were only probable, so long as no arguments are produced to the contrary, that cannot in reason be denied to be a great advantage.

But I will, for the present, suppose the probabilities equal on both sides. And upon this supposition I doubt not to make it appear to be a monstrous folly, to deride these things; because, though the arguments on both sides were equal, yet the danger and hazard is infinitely unequal.

If it prove true, that there is no God, the religious man may be as happy in this world as the Atheist: nay, the principles of religion and virtue do in their own nature tend to make him happier; because they give satisfaction to his mind, and his conscience by this means is freed from many fearful girds and twinges which the Atheist feels. Besides that the practice of religion and virtue doth naturally promote our temporal felicity. It is more for a man's health, and more for his reputation, and more for his advantage in all other worldly respects, to lead a virtuous, than a vicious course of life: and for the other world, if there be no God, the case of the religious man and the Atheist will be alike; because they will both be extinguished by death, and insensible of any farther happiness or misery.

But then, if the contrary opinion should prove true, that there is a God, and that the souls of men are transmitted out of this world into the other, there to receive the just reward of their actions; then it is plain to every man, at first sight, that the case of the religious man and the Atheist must be vastly different: then, *where shall the wicked and the ungodly appear?* and what think we shall be the portion of those who have affronted God, and defied his word, and made a mock of every thing that is sacred and religious? what can they expect, but to be rejected by him whom they have renounced, and to feel the terrible effects of that power and justice which they have despised: So that though the arguments on both sides were equal, yet the danger is not so. On the one

side there is none at all, but it is infinite on the other. And, consequently, it must be a monstrous folly for any man to make a mock of those things which he knows not whether they be or not; and if they be, of all things in the world they are no jesting matters.

3dly, Suppose there be a God, and that the principles of religion are true, then is it not only a heinous impiety, but a perfect madness, to scoff at these things. And that there is a God, and that the principles of religion are true, I have already, in my former discourse, endeavoured to prove, both from the things which are made, and from the general consent of mankind in these principles; of which universal consent, no sufficient reason can be given, unless they were true: and supposing they are so, it is not only the utmost pitch of impiety, but the highest flight of folly that can be imagined, to deride these things. To be disobedient to the commands of God, is a great contempt; but to deny his being, and to make sport with his word, and to endeavour to render it ridiculous, by turning the wise and weighty sayings of that holy book into raillery, is a most direct affront to the God that is above. Thus the Psalmist describes these Atheistical persons, as levelling their blasphemies immediately against the majesty of heaven: *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth; they do mischief among men, but the affront is immediately to God.*

Besides that this profane spirit is an argument of a most incorrigible temper. The wise man every where speaks of the scorner as one of the worst sort of sinners, and hardest to be reclaimed; because he despiseth instruction, and mocks at all the means whereby he should be reformed.

And then, is it not a most black and horrid ingratitude, thus to use the author of our beings, and the patron of our lives; to make a scorn of him that made us; and to live in an open defiance of him, *in whom we live, move, and have our beings?* But this is not all. As it is a most heinous, so it is a most dangerous impiety, to despise him that can destroy us, and to oppose him who is infinitely more powerful than we are. *Will ye (says the Apostle) provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye strong-*

er than he? What Gamaliel said to the Jews, in another case, may with a little change be applied to this sort of men: If there be a God, and the principles of religion be true, *ye cannot overthrow them: therefore refrain from speaking evil against these things, lest ye be found fighters against God.*

I will but add one thing more, to shew the folly of his profane temper; and that is this: That as it is the greatest of all other sins, so there is in truth the least temptation to it. When the devil tempts men with riches or honours to ruin themselves, he offers them some kind of consideration: but the profane person serves the devil for nought, and sins only for sin's sake; suffers himself to be tempted to the greatest sins, and into the greatest dangers, for no other reward, but the slender reputation of seeming to say that wittily which no wise man would say. And what a folly is this, for a man to offend his conscience, to please his humour; and, only for his self, to lose two of the best friends he hath in the world, God, and his own soul?

I have done with the three things I propounded to speak to upon this argument. And now I beg your patience, to apply what I have said to these three purposes:

1. To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly of profaneness, which by some is miscalled wit.

2. To caution men, not to think the worse of religion, because some are so bold as to despise and deride it.

3. To persuade them to employ that reason and wit which God hath given them, to better and nobler purposes, in the service and to the glory of that God who hath bestowed these gifts on men.

1<sup>st</sup>, To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly. I know not how it comes to pass that some men have the fortune to be esteemed wits, only for jesting out of the common road, and for making bold to scoff at those things which the greatest part of mankind reverence: as if man should be accounted a wit, for reviling those in authority; which is no more an argument of any man's wit, than it is of his discretion. A wise man would not speak contemptuously of a great prince, though he were out of his dominions; because he remembers that kings have long hands, and that their

power and influence does many times reach a great way farther than their direct authority. But *God is a great king, and in his hands are all the corners of the earth; we can go no whither from his spirit, nor can we flee from his presence: where-ever we are, his eye sees us, and his right hand can reach us.* If men did truly consult the interest either of their safety or reputation, they would never exercise their wit in dangerous matters. Wit is a very commendable quality; but then a wise man should always have the keeping of it. It is a sharp weapon, as apt for mischief as for good purposes, if it be not well managed. The proper use of it is, to season conversation; to represent what is praise-worthy to the greatest advantage, and to expose the vices and follies of men, such things as are in themselves truly ridiculous: but if it be applied to the abuse of the gravest and most serious matters, it then loses its commendation. If any man thinks he abounds in this quality, and hath wit to spare, there is scope enough for it within the bounds of religion and decency; and when it transgresseth these, it degenerates into insolence and impiety. All wit which borders upon profaneness, and makes bold with those things to which the greatest reverence is due, deserves to be branded for folly.

And if we would preserve ourselves from the infection of this vice, we must take heed how we scoff at religion, under any form, lest insensibly we derive some contempt upon religion itself. And we must likewise take heed how we accustom ourselves to a slight and irreverent use of the name of God, and of the phrases and expressions of the holy Bible, which ought not to be applied upon every light occasion. Men will easily slide into the highest degree of profaneness who are not careful to preserve a due reverence for the great and glorious name of God, and an awful regard to the holy scriptures. None so nearly disposed to scoffing at religion, as those who have accustomed themselves to swear upon trifling occasions. For it is just with God, to permit those who allow themselves in one degree of profaneness, to proceed to another, till at last they come to that height of impiety, as to condemn all religion.

2dly, Let no man think the worse of religion, because

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some are so bold as to despise and deride it: for it is no disparagement to any person or thing to be laughed at, but to deserve to be so. The most grave and serious matters in the whole world are liable to be abused. It is a known saying of Epictetus, "That every thing hath two handles:" by which he means, that there is nothing so bad, but a man may lay hold of something or other about it that will afford matter of excuse and extenuation; nor nothing so excellent, but a man may fasten upon something or other belonging to it whereby to traduce it. A sharp wit may find something in the wisest man whereby to expose him to the contempt of injudicious people. The gravest book that ever was written may be made ridiculous, by applying the sayings of it to a foolish purpose; for a jest may be obtruded upon any thing. And therefore no man ought to have the less reverence for the principles of religion, or for the holy scriptures, because idle and profane wits can break jests upon them. Nothing is so easy as to take particular phrases and expressions out of the best book in the world, and to abuse them, by forcing an odd and ridiculous sense upon them. But no wise man will think a good book foolish for this reason, but the man that abuses it; nor will he esteem that to which every thing is liable, to be a just exception against any thing. At this rate we must despise all things: but surely the better and the shorter way is, to condemn those who would bring any thing that is worthy into contempt.

3dly, and lastly, To persuade men to employ that reason and wit which God hath given them, to better and nobler purposes, in the service and to the glory of that God who hath bestowed these gifts on men; as Aholiab and Bezaleel did their mechanical skill in the adorning and beautifying of God's tabernacle. For this is the perfection of every thing, to attain its true and proper end; and the end of all those gifts and endowments which God hath given us, is, to glorify the giver.

Here is subject enough to exercise the wit of men and angels: to praise that infinite goodness, and almighty power, and exquisite wisdom, which made us and all things; and to admire what we can never sufficiently praise: to vindicate the wise and just providence of God;



God, in the government of the world; and to endeavour, as well as we can upon an imperfect view of things, to make out the beauty and harmony of all the seeming discords and irregularities of the divine administrations: to explain the oracles of the holy scriptures; and to adore that great mystery of divine love, which the angels, better and nobler creatures than we are, desire to pry into, God's sending his only Son into the world, to save sinners, and to give his life a ransom for them. These would be noble exercises indeed for the tongues and pens of the greatest wits. And subjects of this nature are the best trials of our ability in this kind. Satire and invective are the easiest kind of wit; almost any degree of it will serve to abuse and find fault: for wit is a keen instrument, and every one can cut and gash with it; but to carve a beautiful image, and to polish it, requires great art and dexterity. To praise any thing well, is an argument of much more wit than to abuse. A little wit, and a great deal of ill-nature, will furnish a man for satire; but the greatest instance of wit is, to commend well. And perhaps the best things are the hardest to be duly commended: for though there be a great deal of matter to work upon, yet there is great judgment required to make choice; and where the subject is great and excellent, it is hard not to sink below the dignity of it.

This I say on purpose to recommend to men a nobler exercise for their wits, and, if it be possible, to put them out of conceit with that scoffing humour which is so easy and so ill-natured, and is not only an enemy to religion, but to every thing else that is wise and worthy. And I am very much mistaken, if the state as well as the church, the civil government as well as religion, do not in a short space find the intolerable inconvenience of this humour.

But I confine myself to the consideration of religion. And it is sad indeed, that in a nation professing Christianity so horrid an impiety should dare to appear. But the scripture hath foretold us, that this sort of men should arise in the gospel-age; and they did appear even in the Apostles days. That which is more sad and strange is, that we should persist in this profaneness notwithstanding the terrible judgments of God which have been abroad

in this nation. God hath of late years manifested himself in a very dreadful manner, as if it were on purpose to give a check to this insolent impiety: and now that those judgments have done no good upon us, we may justly fear that he will appear once for all. And it is time for him to shew himself when his very being is called in question, and to come and judge the world when men begin to doubt whether he made it.

The scripture mentions two things as the forerunners and reasons of his coming to judgment; infidelity, and profane scoffing at religion: *When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?* Luke xviii. 8. And St. Jude, out of an ancient prophecy of Enoch, expressly mentions this as one reason of the coming of the Lord, *To convince ungodly sinners of their hard speeches which they spoken against him,* Jude, v. 15.

And if these things be a sign and reason of his coming, I wish that we in this age had not too much cause to apprehend *the judge to be at the door.* This impiety did forerun the destruction of Jerusalem, and the utter ruin of the Jewish nation; and if it hold on amongst us, may not we have reason to fear, that either *the end of all things is at hand,* or that some very dismal calamity, greater than any our eyes have yet seen, does hang over us? But I would fain hope that God hath mercy still for us, and that men will pity themselves, and *repent, and give glory to God;* and *know in this their day the things that belong to their peace.* Which God of his infinite mercy grant for the sake of Christ. To whom, with the Father, &c.

## S E R M O N III.

## The advantages of religion to societies.

P R O V. xiv. 34.

*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is the reproach of any people.*

**O**NE of the first principles that is planted in the nature of man, and which lies at the very root and foundation of his being, is, the desire of his own preservation and happiness. Hence it is, that every man is led by interest, and does love or hate, chuse or refuse things, according as he apprehends them to conduce to this end, or to contradict it. And because the happiness of this life is most present and sensible, therefore human nature, which in this degenerate state is extremely sunk down into sense, is most powerfully affected with sensible and temporal things: and, consequently, there cannot be a greater prejudice raised against any thing, than to have it represented as inconvenient and hurtful to our temporal interests.

Upon this account it is that religion hath extremely suffered in the opinion of many, as if it were opposite to our present welfare, and did rob men of the greatest advantages and conveniencies of life. So that he that would do right to religion, and make a ready way for the entertainment of it among men, cannot take a more effectual course, than by reconciling it with the happiness of mankind; and by giving satisfaction to our reason, that it is so far from being an enemy, that it is the greatest friend to our temporal interests; and that it doth not only tend to make every man happy considered singly and in a private capacity, but is excellently fitted for the benefit of human society.

How much religion tends even to the temporal advantage of private persons, I shall not now consider, because my text leads me to discourse of the other, namely, to  
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shew how advantageous religion and virtue are to the publick prosperity of a nation; which I take to be the meaning of this aphorism of Solomon, *Righteousness exalteth a nation, &c.*

And here I shall not restrain righteousness to the particular virtue of justice, though in this sense also this saying is most true, but enlarge it according to the genius and strain of the book of the Proverbs; in which the words *wisdom* and *righteousness* are commonly used very comprehensively, so as to signify all religion and virtue. And that this word is so to be taken in the text, may appear farther from the opposition of it to sin or vice in general: *Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is the reproach of any people.*

You see then what will be the subject of my present discourse, namely, That religion and virtue are the great causes of publick happiness and prosperity.

And though the truth of this hath been universally acknowledged, and long enough experienced in the world, yet, because the fashion of the age is to call every thing into question, it will be requisite to satisfy mens reason about it. To which end I shall do these two things:

1. Endeavour to give an account of this truth.
2. To vindicate it from the pretences and insinuations of Atheistical persons.

I. I shall give you this twofold account of it.

1. From the justice of the divine providence.
2. From the natural tendency of the thing.

*1<sup>st</sup>*, From the justice of the divine providence. Indeed, as to particular persons, the providences of God are many times promiscuously administered in this world; so that no man can certainly conclude God's love or hatred to any person by any thing that befalls him in this life. But God does not deal thus with nations; because publick bodies and communities of men, as such, can only be rewarded and punished in this world. For, in the next, all those publick societies and combinations wherein men are now linked together under several governments, shall be dissolved. God will not then reward or punish nations, as nations; but every man shall then give an account of himself to God, and receive his own reward, and bear his own burthen. For although God accounts

it no disparagement to his justice to let particular good men suffer in this world, and pass through many tribulations into the kingdom of God; because there is another day a coming which will be a more proper season of reward: yet, in the usual course of his providence, he recompenseth religious and virtuous nations with temporal blessings and prosperity. For which reason St. Austin tells us, that the mighty success and long prosperity of the Romans was a reward given them by God for their eminent justice and temperance, and other virtues. And, on the other hand, God many times suffers the most grievous sins of particular persons to go unpunished in this world, because he knows that his justice will have another and better opportunity to meet and reckon with them. But the general and crying sins of a nation cannot hope to escape publick judgments, unless they be prevented by a general repentance. God may defer his judgments for a time, and give a people a longer space of repentance; he may stay till the iniquities of a nation be full; but sooner or later they have reason to expect his vengeance. And usually the longer punishment is delayed, it is the heavier when it comes.

Now, all this is very reasonable, because this world is the only season for national punishments. And indeed they are in a great degree necessary for the present vindication of the honour and majesty of the divine laws, and to give some check to the overflowing of wickedness. Publick judgments are the banks and shores upon which God breaks the insolence of sinners, and stays their proud waves. And tho' among men the multitude of offenders be many times a cause of impunity, because of the weakness of human governments, which are glad to spare where they are not strong enough to punish; yet in the government of God things are quite otherwise. No combination of sinners is too hard for him; and the greater and more numerous the offenders are, the more his justice is concerned to vindicate the affront. However God may pass by single sinners in this world, yet when a nation combines against him, *when hand joins in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.*

This the scripture declares to be the settled course of God's providence, that a righteous nation shall be hap-

*py: The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. And, on the other hand, that he useth to shower down his judgments upon a wicked people: He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.*

And the experience of all ages hath made this good. All along the history of the Old Testament, we find the interchangeable providences of God towards the people of Israel always suited to their manners. They were constantly prosperous or afflicted according as piety and virtue flourished or declined amongst them. And God did not only exercise this providence towards his own people, but he dealt thus also with other nations. The Roman empire, whilst the virtue of that people remained firm, was *strong as iron*, as it is represented in the prophecy of Daniel: but, upon the dissolution of their manners, the iron began *to be mixed with miry clay*, and the feet upon which that empire stood *to be broken*. And though God, in the administration of his justice, be not tied to precedents, and we cannot argue from scripture-examples that the providences of God towards other nations shall in all circumstances be conformable to his dealings with the people of Israel; yet thus much may with great probability be collected from them, that as God always blessed that people while they were obedient to him, and followed them with his judgments when they rebelled against him, so he will also deal with other nations: because the reason of those dispensations, as to the main and substance of them, seems to be perpetual, and founded in that which can never change, the justice of the divine providence.

2dly, The truth of this farther appears from the natural tendency of the thing. For religion in general, and every particular virtue, doth in its own nature conduce to the publick interest.

Religion, where-ever it is truly planted, is certainly the greatest obligation upon conscience to all civil offices and moral duties. Chastity, and temperance, and industry, do in their own nature tend to health and plenty. Truth and fidelity in all our dealings do create mutual love and good-will, and confidence among men; which

are the great bands of peace. And, on the contrary, wickedness doth in its own nature produce many publick mischiefs. For as sins are linked together, and draw on one another; so almost every vice hath some temporal inconvenience annexed to it, and naturally following it. Intemperance and lust breed infirmities and diseases; which, being propagated, spoil the strain of a nation. Idleness and luxury bring forth poverty and want; and this tempts men to injustice, and that causeth enmity and animosities, and these bring on *strife and confusion, and every evil work*. This philosophical account of publick troubles and confusions St. James gives us: *Whence come wars and fightings among you? are they not hence, even from your lusts, that war in your members?* Jam. iv. 1.

But I shall shew more particularly, that religion and virtue do naturally tend to the good order and more easy government of human society; because they have a good influence both upon magistrates and subjects.

1. Upon magistrates. Religion teacheth them to rule over men in the fear of God; because tho' they be gods on earth, yet they are subjects of heaven, and accountable to him who is higher than the highest in this world. Religion in a magistrate strengthens his authority; because it procures veneration and gains a reputation to it. And in all the affairs of this world, so much reputation is really so much power. We see, that piety and virtue, where they are found among men of lower degree, will command some reverence and respect; but in persons of eminent place and dignity, they are seated to a great advantage, so as to cast a lustre upon their very place, and by a strong reflexion to double the beams of majesty. Whereas impiety and vice do strangely lessen greatness, and do secretly and unavoidably derive some weakness upon authority itself. Of this the scripture gives us a remarkable instance in David. For, among other things which made *the sons of Zeruah too hard for him*, this probably was none of the least, that they were particularly conscious to his crimes.

2. Religion hath a good influence upon the people, to make them obedient to government, and peaceable one towards another.

*1<sup>st</sup>*, To make them obedient to government, and conformable



formable to laws; and that *not only for wrath*, and out of fear of the magistrate's power; which is but a weak and loose principle of obedience, and will cease, whenever men can rebel with safety, and to advantage; but out of *conscience*; which is a firm, and constant, and lasting principle, and will hold a man fast when all other obligations will break. He that hath entertained the true principles of Christianity, is not to be tempted from his obedience and subjection by any worldly considerations; because he believes, that *whosoever resisteth authority, resisteth the ordinance of God*; and that *they who resist, shall receive to themselves damnation*.

2dly, Religion tends to make men peaceable one towards another. For it endeavours to plant all those qualities and dispositions in men which tend to peace and unity, and to fill men with a spirit of universal love and good-will. It endeavours likewise to secure every man's interest, by commanding the observation of that great rule of equity, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*; by enjoining that truth and fidelity be inviolably observed in all our words, promises and contracts. And, in order hereunto, it requires the extirpation of all those passions and vices which render men unsociable and troublesome to one another; as pride, covetousness and injustice, hatred, and revenge and cruelty; and those likewise which are not so commonly reputed vices, as self-conceit, and pre-emptoriness in a man's own opinion, and all peevishness and incomppliance of humour in things lawful and indifferent.

And that these are the proper effects of true piety, the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles every where teacheth us. Now, if this be the design of religion, to bring us to this temper, thus to heal the natures of men, and to sweeten their spirits; to correct their passions, and to mortify all those lusts which are the causes of enmity and division: then it is evident, that in its own nature it tends to the peace and happiness of human society; and that, if men would but live as religion requires they should do, the world would be a quiet habitation, a most lovely and desirable place in comparison of what now it is. And, indeed, the true reason why the societies of

men are so full of tumult and disorder, so troublesome and tempestuous, is because there is so little of true religion among men: so that, were it not for some small remainders of piety and virtue which are yet left scattered among mankind, human society would in a short space disband, and run into confusion; the earth would grow wild, and become a great forest; and mankind would become beasts of prey one towards another. And if this discourse hold true, surely then one would think, that virtue should find itself a seat where-ever human societies are, and that religion should be owned and encouraged in the world, until men cease to be governed by reason.

II. I come to vindicate this truth from the insinuations and pretences of Atheistical persons. I shall mention two.

1. That government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God, and a state of rewards and punishments after this life.

2. That as for virtue and vice, they are arbitrary things.

1<sup>st</sup>, That government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God, or a state of rewards and punishments after this life. And this the Atheist does and must assert, otherwise he is by his own confession a declared enemy to government, and unfit to live in human society.

For answer to this, I will not deny, but that though the generality of men did not believe any superior being, nor any rewards and punishments after this life; yet, notwithstanding this, there might be some kind of government kept up in the world. For supposing men to have reason, the necessities of human nature, and the mischiefs of confusion, would probably compel them into some kind of order. But then I say withal, that if these principles were banished out of the world, government would be far more difficult than now it is; because it would want its firmest basis and foundation. There would be infinitely more disorders in the world, if men were restrained from injustice and violence only by human laws, and not by principles of conscience, and the  
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dread of another world. Therefore magistrates have always thought themselves concerned to cherish religion, and so maintain in the minds of men the belief of a God and another life. Nay, that common suggestion of Atheistical persons, that religion was at first a politick device, and is still kept up in the world as a state-engine to awe men into obedience, is a clear acknowledgment of the usefulness of it to the ends of government; and does as fully contradict that pretence of theirs, which I am now confuting, as any thing that can be said.

2dly, That virtue and vice are arbitrary things, founded only in the imaginations of men, and in the constitutions and customs of the world, but not in the nature of the things themselves; and that that is virtue or vice, good or evil, which the supreme authority of a nation declares to be so. And this is frequently and confidently asserted by the ingenious author of a very bad book, I mean the *Leviathan*.

Now, the proper way of answering any thing that is confidently asserted, is to shew the contrary, namely, That there are some things that have a natural evil and deformity in them, as perjury, perfidiousness, unrighteousness, and ingratitude; which are things not only condemned by the positive laws and constitutions of particular nations and governments, but by the general verdict of human nature: and that the virtues contrary to these have a natural goodness and comeliness in them, and are suitable to the common principles and sentiments of humanity.

And this will most evidently appear, by putting this supposition. Suppose the reverse of all that which we now call virtue were solemnly enacted, and the practice of fraud, and rapine, and perjury, and falseness to a man's word, and all manner of vice and wickedness were established by a law; I ask now, if the case between virtue and vice were thus altered, would that which we now call vice in process of time gain the reputation of virtue, and that which we now call virtue grow odious and contemptible to human nature? If it would not, then is there something in the nature of good and evil, of virtue and vice, which does not depend upon the pleasure of authority, nor is subject to any arbitrary constitution.

tution. But that it would not be thus, I am very certain; because no government could subsist upon these terms. For the very enjoining of fraud and rapine, and perjury and breach of trust, doth apparently destroy the greatest end of government; which is, to preserve men in their rights, against the encroachments of fraud and violence. And this end being destroyed, human societies would presently fly in pieces, and men would necessarily fall into a state of war. Which plainly shews, that virtue and vice are not arbitrary things, but that there is a natural, and immutable, and eternal reason for that which we call goodness and virtue, and against that which we call vice and wickedness.

Thus I have endeavoured to evidence and vindicate this truth. I shall only draw an inference or two from this discourse, and so conclude.

1: If this discourse be true, then those who are in places of power and authority are peculiarly concerned to maintain the honour of religion.

2. It concerns every one to live in the practice of it.

*1st*, Magistrates are concerned to maintain the honour of religion, which doth not only tend to every man's future happiness, but is the best instrument of civil government, and of the temporal prosperity of a nation. For the whole design of it is, to procure the private and publick happiness of mankind, and to restrain men from all those things which would make them miserable and guilty to themselves, unpeaceable and troublesome to the world. Religion hath so great an influence upon the felicity of men, that it ought to be upheld, and the veneration of it maintained, not only out of a just dread of the divine vengeance in another world, but out of regard to the temporal peace and prosperity of men. It will requite all the kindness and honour we can do it, by the advantages it will bring to civil government, and by the blessings it will draw down upon it. God hath promised, *that those that honour him, he will honour*, and in the common courie of his providence he usually makes this good: so that the civil authority ought to be very tender of the honour of God and religion, if for no other reason, yet out of reason of state.

It were to be wished, that all men were so piously disposed,

posed, that religion, by its own authority, and the reasonable force of it, might be sufficient to establish its empire in the minds of men. But the corruptions of men will always make a strong opposition against it. And therefore, at the first planting of the Christian religion in the world, God was pleased to accompany it with a miraculous power: but, after it was planted, this extraordinary power ceased; and God hath now left it to be maintained and supported by more ordinary and human ways, by the countenance of authority, and assistance of laws; which were never more necessary than in this degenerate age, which is prodigiously sunk into Atheism and profaneness, and is running headlong into an humour of scoffing at God and religion, and every thing that is sacred. For some ages before the reformation, Atheism was confined to Italy, and had its chief residence at Rome. All the mention that is of it in the history of those times, the Papists themselves give us in the lives of their own Popes and Cardinals, excepting two or three small philosophers that were retainers to that court. So that this Atheistical humour among Christians, was the spawn of the gross superstitions and corrupt manners of the Romish church and court. And indeed nothing is more natural, than for extremes in religion to beget one another, like the vibrations of a pendulum, which the more violently you swing it one way, the farther it will return the other. But, in the last age, Atheism travelled over the Alps, and infected France; and now of late, it hath crossed the seas, and invaded our nation, and hath prevailed to amazement: for I do not think that there are any people in the world that are generally more indisposed to it, and can worse brook it; seriousness and zeal in religion being almost the natural temper of the English. So that nothing is to me matter of greater wonder, than that in a grave and sober nation profaneness should ever come to gain so much ground, and the best and the wisest religion in the world to be made the scorn of fools. For, besides the profane and Atheistical discourses about God and religion, and the bold and senseless abuses of his sacred book, the great instrument of our salvation, which are so frequent in the public places of resort; I say, besides these, I speak it knowingly,

knowingly, a man can hardly pass the streets without having his ears grated and pierced with such horrid and blasphemous oaths and curses, as are enough, if we were guilty of no other sin, to sink a nation. And this not only from the tribe that wear liveries, but from those that go before them, and should give better example. Is it not then high time that the laws should provide, by the most prudent and effectual means, to curb these bold and insolent defiers of heaven, who take a pride in being monsters; and boast themselves in the follies and deformities of human nature? The Heathens would never suffer their gods to be reviled, which yet were no gods: and shall it, among the professors of the true religion, be allowed to any man to make a mock of him that made heaven and earth, and to breath out blasphemies against him who gives us life, and breath, and all things? I doubt not but hypocrisy is a great wickedness, and very odious to God; but by no means of so pernicious example as open profaneness. Hypocrisy is a more modest way of sinning; it shews some reverence to religion, and does so far own the worth and excellency of it, as to acknowledge that it deserves to be counterfeited: whereas profaneness declares openly against it, and endeavours to make a party to drive it out of the world.

2dly, It concerns every one to live in the practice of religion and virtue; because the public happiness and prosperity depends upon it. It is most apparent that of late years religion is very sensibly declined among us. The manners of men have almost been universally corrupted by a civil war. We should therefore all jointly endeavour to retrieve the ancient virtue of the nation, and bring into fashion again that solid and substantial, that plain and unaffected piety, free from the extremes both of superstition and enthusiasm, which flourished in the age of our immediate forefathers: which did not consist in idle talk, but in real effects, in a sincere love of God and of our neighbour, in a pious devotion and reverence towards the divine Majesty, and in the virtuous actions of a good life, in the denial of *ungedliness and worldly lusts, and in living soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.* This were the true way to reconcile God to us, to stop the course of his judgments, and

to bring down the blessings of heaven upon us. God hath now been pleased to settle us again in peace both at home and abroad, and he hath put us once more into the hands of our own counsel. Life and death, blessing and cursing, prosperity and destruction are before us. We may chuse our own fortune; and, if we be not wanting to ourselves, we may, under the influences of God's grace and assistance, which are never wanting to our sincere endeavours, become a happy and a prosperous people.

The good God make us all wise to know and to do the things that belong to the temporal peace and prosperity of the nation, and to the eternal happiness and salvation of every one of our souls. Which we humbly beg for the sake of Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

## S E R M O N IV.

The advantages of religion to particular persons.

PSAL. xix. II.

*And in keeping of them there is great reward.*

**I**N this psalm David celebrates the glory of God from the consideration of the greatness of his works, and the perfection of his laws. From the greatness of his works, v. 1. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, &c.* From the perfection of his laws, v. 7. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, &c.* And among many other excellencies of the divine laws, he mentions, in the last place, the benefits and advantages which come from the observance of them, v. 11. *And in keeping of them there is great reward.*

I have already shewn how much religion tends to the public welfare of mankind; to the support of government,



passions and keeps them under, doth thereby preserve and improve his understanding. Freedom from irregular passions doth not only signify that a man is wise, but really contributes to the making of him such.

2dly, Religion tends to the ease and pleasure, the peace and tranquillity of our minds; wherein happiness chiefly consists, and which all the wisdom and philosophy in the world did always aim at, as the utmost felicity of this life. And that this is the natural fruit of a religious and virtuous course of life, the scripture declares to us in these texts. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart, Psal. xcvi. 11. Great peace have all they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them, Psal. cxix. 165. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace, Prov. iii. 17. The fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever, Il. xxxii. 17.* The plain sense of which texts is, that pleasure and peace do naturally result from a holy and good life. When a man hath once engaged himself in a religious course, and is habituated to piety and holiness, all the exercises of religion and devotion, all acts of goodness and virtue, are delightful to him. To honour and worship God, to pray to him and to praise him, to study his will, to meditate upon him and to love him; all these bring great pleasure and peace along with them. What greater contentment and satisfaction can there be to the mind of man, when it is once purified and refined from the dregs of sensual pleasures and delights, and raised to its true height and pitch, than to contemplate and admire the infinite excellencies and perfections of God; to adore his greatness, and to love his goodness? How can the thoughts of God be troublesome to any one who lives soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world? No man that loves goodness and righteousness, hath any reason to be afraid of God, or to be disquieted with the thoughts of him. There is nothing in God that is terrible to a good man, but all the apprehensions which we naturally have of him, speak comfort and promise happiness to such a one. The consideration of his attributes is so far from being a trouble to him, that it is his recreation and delight. It is for wicked men to dread God, and to endeavour to banish

banish the thoughts of him out of their minds; but a holy and virtuous man may have quiet and undisturbed thoughts even of the justice of God, because the terror of it doth not concern him.

Now, religion doth contribute to the peace and quiet of our minds these two ways. 1. By allaying those passions which are apt to ruffle and discompose our spirits. Malice and hatred, wrath and revenge, are very fretting and vexatious, and apt to make our minds sore and uneasy; but he that can moderate these affections, will find a strange ease and pleasure in his own spirit. 2. By freeing us from the anxieties of guilt, and the fears of divine wrath and displeasure; than which nothing is more stinging and tormenting, and renders the life of man more miserable and unquiet. And what a spring of peace and joy must it needs be, to apprehend, upon good grounds, that God is reconciled to us, and become our friend; that all our sins are perfectly forgiven, and shall never more be remembered against us! What inexpressible comfort does overflow the pious and devout soul, from the remembrance of a holy and well-spent life, and the conscience of its own innocency and integrity! And nothing but the practice of religion and virtue can give his ease and satisfaction to the mind of man. For there is a certain kind of temper and disposition which is necessary to the pleasure and quiet of our minds, and consequently to our happiness; and that is, holiness and goodness; which, as it is the perfection, so is it likewise the happiness of the divine nature. And, on the contrary, the chief part of the misery of wicked men, and of those accursed spirits the devils, is this, that they are of a disposition contrary to God; they are envious and malicious, and cruel, and of such a temper as is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself. And here the foundation of hell is laid, in the evil disposition of mens minds; and till this be cured, which can only be done by religion, it is as impossible for a man to be happy, that is, pleased and contented within himself, as it is for a sick man to be at ease; because such a man hath that within him which torments him, and he cannot be at ease till that be removed. The man's spirit is out of order, and off the hinges; and till that be put into its right frame, he will be perpetually dis-

quieted, and can find no rest within himself. The Prophet very fitly describes to us the unquiet condition of wicked men: *The wicked is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,* Is. lvii. 20. 21. So long as sin and corruption abound in our hearts, they will be restlessly working, like wine, which will be in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itself of its dregs and foulness.

II. Religion does likewise tend to the happiness of the outward man. Now, the blessings of this kind are such as either respect our health, or estate, or reputation, or relations; and in respect of all these, religion is highly advantageous to us.

*1st,* As to our health; a religious and virtuous life doth eminently induce to that, and to long life as a consequent of it. And in this sense I understand these following texts. *My son, forget not my law; but let thy heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, shall they add to thee,* Prov. iii. 1. 2. and v. 7. and 8. *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.* And v. 16. among the temporal advantages of wisdom or religion, this is mentioned as the first and principal, *Length of days is in her right hand;* and v. 18. *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.* And again, *Whoso findeth me findeth life. But he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; that is, is injurious to his own life: all they that hate me, love death,* Prov. viii. 35. 36. All which is undoubtedly true in a spiritual sense, but is certainly meant by Solomon in the natural sense. And these promises of the blessings of health and long life to good men, are not only declaratory of the good pleasure and intention of God towards them, but likewise of the natural tendency of the thing. For religion doth oblige men to the practice of those virtues which do in their own nature conduce to the preservation of our health, and the lengthening of our days; such as, temperance, and chastity, and moderation of our passions. And the contrary vices to these do apparently tend to the impairing of mens health, and the shortening of their days. How many have wasted and consumed their bodies by lust, and brought

rought grievous pains and mortal diseases upon themselves! See how the wise man describes the sad consequences of this sin. *He goes as an ox to the slaughter, till the dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life,* Prov. vii. 2. 23; and v. 25. 26. 27. *Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, (that is, to the grave) going down to the chambers of death.* How many have been ruined by intemperance and excess, and most unnaturally have perverted those blessings which God hath given for the support of nature, to the overthrow and destruction of it? How often hath mens malice, and envy, and discontent against others, terminated in a cruel revenge upon themselves? How many, by the wild fury and extravagancy of their own passions, have put their bodies into a combustion; and fired their spirits; and, by stirring up their rage and choler against others, have harmed that fierce humour against themselves?

2dly, As to our estates; religion is likewise a mighty advantage to men in that respect: not only in regard of God's more especial providence and peculiar blessing, which usually attends good men in their undertakings, and crowns them with good success; but also from the nature of the thing. And this, I doubt not, is the meaning of those expressions of the wise man concerning the temporal benefits and advantages of wisdom or religion. *Her left hand are riches and honour,* Prov. iii. 16. *They that love me, shall inherit substance; and I will give them their treasures,* Prov. viii. 21. And this religion principally does, by charging men with truth, and fidelity, and justice in their dealings; which are a sure way of thriving, and will hold out when all fraudulent arts and devices will fail. And this also Solomon observes to us: *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his way, shall be known,* Prov. x. 9. his indirect dealing will be discovered one time or other, and then he loses his reputation, and his interest sinks. Falshood and deceit only serve a present turn, and the consequence of them is pernicious; but truth and fidelity are a lasting advantage: *The righteous hath an everlasting foundation,*

Prov. x. 25. *The lip of truth is established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment*, Prov. xii. 19. And religion does likewise engage men to diligence and industry in their callings. And how much this conduces to the advancement of mens fortunes, daily experience teaches. And the wise man hath told us, *The diligent hand makes rich*, Prov. x. 4. And again, *Seest thou a man diligent in business? he shall stand before princes; he shall not stand before mean persons*, Prov. xxii. 29.

And where men, by reason of the difficult circumstances of their condition, cannot arrive to any eminency of estate; yet religion makes a compensation for this, by teaching men to be contented with that moderate and competent fortune which God hath given them. For the shortest way to be rich is, not by enlarging our estates but by contracting our desires. What Seneca says of philosophy, is much more true of religion, *Præstat opes sapientia, quas cuicumque fecit supervacuas dedit*: “It makes all those rich to whom it makes riches superfluous;” and they are so to those who are taught by religion to be contented with such a portion of them as God’s providence hath thought fit to allot to them.

3dly, As to our reputation. There is nothing gives man a more firm and established reputation among wise and serious persons, whose judgment is only valuable than a prudent and substantial piety. This doth many times command reverence and esteem from the worst sort of men, and such as are no great friends to religion; and sometimes the force of truth will extort an acknowledgment of its excellency, even from its greatest enemies. I know very well that good men may, and often do blemish the reputation of their piety, by overacting some things in religion; by an indiscreet zeal about things wherein religion is not concerned; by an ungrateful austerity and sowerness, which religion doth not require; by little affectations, and an imprudent ostentation of devotion. But a substantial and solid, a discreet and unaffected piety, which makes no great noise and shew, but expresses itself in a constant and serious devotion, and is accompanied with the fruits of goodness and kindness, and righteousness towards men, will not only give a man a credit and value among the sober and

he virtuous, but even among the vicious and more degenerate sort of men. Upon this account it is that the Apostle adviseth Christians, if they would recommend themselves to the esteem of God and men, earnestly to mind the weighty and substantial parts of religion: *Let not their good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

It is true indeed, there are some persons of so profligate a temper, and of such an inveterate enmity to all goodness, as to scorn and reproach even religion and virtue itself. But the reproach of such persons does not really wound a man's reputation. For why should any man be troubled at the contumelies of those whose judgment deserves not to be valued, who despise goodness and good men out of malice and ignorance? If these reproaches, which they cast upon them, were the censures of wise and sober men, a man's reputation might be concerned in them; but they are the rash words of inconsiderate and injudicious men, the extravagant speeches of those who are unexperienced in the things they speak against: and therefore no wise man will be troubled at them, or think either religion or himself disparaged by them.

4thly, As to our relations. Religion also conduceth to the happiness of these, as it derives a large and extensive blessing upon all that belongs to us; the goodness of God being so diffusive as to scatter his blessings round about the habitations of the just, and to shew mercy unto thousands of them that love him, and keep his commandments. So David tells us, *Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon the earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house; and his righteousness endureth for ever,* Psal. cxii. 1. 2. 3. And so Solomon: *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children,* Prov. xiii. 22. And again, *In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge.* Prov. xiv. 26. But the wicked derives a curse upon all that is related to him: he is said to trouble his own house, Prov. xi. 29. And again, *The*



wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand, Prov. xii. 7.

But, setting aside the consideration of God's providence, religion doth likewise, in its own nature, tend to the welfare of those who are related to us; because it lays the strictest obligations upon men to take care of their families and relations, and to make the best provision both for their comfortable subsistence here in this world, and their salvation in the next. And those who neglect these duties, the scripture is so far from esteeming them Christians, that it accounts them worse than Heathens and infidels: *He that provideth not for his own, especially those of his own house, is worse than an infidel, and hath denied the faith,* 1 Tim. v. 8. This I know is spoken in respect of temporal provision; but it holds *à fortiori* as to the care of their souls.

Besides, it is many times seen, that the posterity of holy and good men, especially of such as have evidenced their piety towards God by bounty and charity to men, have met with unusual kindness and respect from others, and have by a strange and secret disposition of divine providence, been unexpectedly cared and provided for; and that, as they have all the reason in the world to believe, upon the account and for the sake of the piety and charity of their parents. This David tells us from his own particular observation: *I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread,* Psal. xxxvii. 25. And that by the *righteous* is here meant the good and merciful man, appears from the description of him in the next words, *He is ever merciful and lendeth: and his seed is blessed,* v. 26. And on the contrary, the posterity of the wicked do many times inherit the fruit of their fathers sins and vices; and that not only by a just judgment of God, but from the natural course and consequence of things. And in this sense that expression in Job is often verified, *that God lays up the iniquity of wicked men for their children,* Job xxi. 19. And doth not experience testify, that the intemperate and unjust do many times transmit their bodily infirmities and diseases to their children, and entail a secret curse upon their estates, which does either insensibly waste and consume it, or eat out the heart and comfort



port of it? Thus you see how religion in all respects conduces to the happiness of this life.

*Secondly*, Religion and virtue do likewise most certainly and directly tend to the eternal happiness and salvation of men in the other world. And this is incomparably the greatest advantage that redounds to men by being religious; in comparison of which all temporal considerations are *less than nothing, and vanity*. The worldly advantages that religion brings to men in this present life, are a sensible recommendation of religion even to the lowest and meanest spirits. But to those who are raised above sense, and aspire after immortality, who believe the perpetual duration of their souls, and the resurrection of their bodies; to those who are thoroughly convinced of the inconsiderableness of this short dying life, and of all the concernments of it, in comparison of that eternal state which remains for us in another life: to these, I say, the consideration of a future happiness, and of those unspeakable and everlasting rewards, which shall then be given to holiness and virtue, is certainly the most powerful motive, and the most likely to prevail upon them. For those who are persuaded that they shall continue forever, cannot chuse but aspire after a happiness commensurate to their duration; nor can any thing that is conscious to itself of its own immortality, be satisfied and contented with any thing less than the hopes of an endless felicity. And this hope religion alone gives men; and the Christian religion only can settle men in a firm and unshaken assurance of it. But because all men who have entertained any religion have consented to these principles, of the immortality of the soul, and the recompences of another world, and have always promised to themselves some rewards of piety and virtue after this life; and because I did more particularly design from his text to speak of the temporal benefits and advantages which redound to men from religion: therefore I shall content myself to shew very briefly, how a religious and virtuous life doth conduce to our future happiness; and that upon these two accounts; from the promise of God, and from the nature of the thing.

*1st*, From the promise of God. *Godliness* (saith the Apostle) *hath the promise of the life that is to come*, 1 Tim.

iv. 8. God hath all along in the scripture suspended the promise of eternal life upon this condition. He hath peremptorily declared, that without obedience and holiness of life no man shall ever see the Lord. And this very thing, that it is the constitution and appointment of God, might be argument enough to us, (if there were no other), to convince us of the necessity of obeying the laws of God in order to our happiness, and to persuade us thereunto. For eternal life is the gift of God, and he may do what he will with his own. He is master of his own favours, and may dispense them upon what terms and conditions he pleases. But it is no hard condition that he hath imposed upon us. If religion brought no advantages to us in this world, yet the happiness of heaven is so great as will abundantly recompense all our pains and endeavours: there is temptation enough in the reward to engage any man in the work. Had God thought fit to have imposed the most grievous and difficult things upon us, ought we not to have submitted to them, and to have undertaken them with cheerfulness upon such great and glorious encouragements? As Naaman's servants said to him in another case, *Had he bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?* So if God had said, that without poverty and actual martyrdom *no man shall see the Lord*, would not any man that believes heaven and hell, and understands what these words signify, and what it is to escape extreme and eternal misery, and to enjoy unspeakable and endless glory, have been willing to accept these conditions? *How much more, when he hath only said, Wash and be clean, and, Let every man that hath this hope in him, purify himself, as he is pure?* But God hath not dealt thus with us; nor is the imposing of this condition of eternal life a mere arbitrary constitution. Therefore I shall endeavour to shew,

2dly, That a religious and holy life doth, from the very nature and reason of the thing, conduce to our future happiness, by way of necessary disposition and preparation of us for it. We cannot be otherwise happy, but by our conformity to God; without this we cannot possibly love him, nor find any pleasure or happiness in communion with him: for we cannot love a nature contra-

to our own, nor delight to converse with it. There-  
re religion, in order to the fitting of us for the happi-  
ness of the next life, does design to mortify our lusts and  
passions, and to restrain us from the inordinate love of  
the gross and sensual delights of this world; to call off  
our minds from these inferior things, and to raise them  
to higher and more spiritual objects, that we may be dis-  
posed for the happiness of the other world, and taught  
to relish the delights of it: whereas, should we set our  
parts only upon these things, and be able to taste no  
pleasure in any thing but what is sensual and earthly, we  
must needs be extremely miserable when we come into  
the other world; because we should meet with nothing  
to entertain ourselves withal, no employment suitable to  
our disposition, no pleasure that would agree with our  
deprav'd appetites and vitious inclinations. All that hea-  
ven and happiness signifies, is unsuitable to a wicked man,  
and therefore could be no felicity to him. But this I  
shall have occasion to speak more fully to in my next  
discourse.

From all that hath been said, the reasonableness of  
religion clearly appears, which tends so directly to the  
happiness of men, and is upon all accounts calculated  
for our benefit. Let but all things be truly considered  
and cast up, and it will be found that there is no advan-  
tage to any man from an irreligious and vitious course of  
life. I challenge any one to instance in any real benefit  
that ever came to him this way. Let the sinner declare  
what he hath found by experience. Hath lewdness and  
intemperance been more for his health than if he had  
lived chastely and soberly? hath falshood and injustice  
proved at the long-run more for the advancement and  
security of his estate, than truth and honesty would have  
done? hath any vice that he hath lived in made him  
more true friends, and gained him a better reputation  
in the world, than the practice of holiness and virtue  
would have done? hath he found that peace and satisfac-  
tion of mind in an evil course, and that quiet enjoy-  
ment of himself, and comfortable assurance of God's fa-  
vour, and good hopes of his future condition, which a  
religious and virtuous life would have given him? Nay,  
on the contrary, have not some of his vices weakened  
his

his body, and broken his health? have not others dissipated his estate, and reduced him to want? What notorious vice is there that doth not blemish a man's reputation, and make him either hated or despised; and that not only by the wise and the virtuous, but even by the generality of men? But was ever any wicked man freed from the stings of a guilty conscience, and the torment of a restless and uneasy mind; from the secret dread of divine displeasure, and of the vengeance of another world? Let the sinner freely speak the very inward sense of his soul in this matter, and spare not; and I doubt not, if he will deal clearly and impartially, but that he will acknowledge all this to be true, and is able to confirm it from his own sad experience. For this is the natural fruit of sin, and the present revenge which it takes upon sinners, besides that fearful punishment which shall be inflicted on them in another life.

What reason then can any man pretend against religion, when it is so apparently for the benefit, not only of human society, but of every particular person; when there is no real interest of this world, but may ordinarily be as effectually promoted, and pursued to as great advantage, nay usually to far greater, by a man that *lives soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world*, than by any one that leads the contrary course of life? Let no man then say, with those profane persons whom the Prophet speaks of, *It is in vain to serve the Lord: and what profit is it that we have kept his commandments?* Mal. iii. 14. God has not been so hard a master to us, that we have reason thus to complain of him. He hath given us no laws, but what are for our good; nay, so gracious hath he been to us, as to link together our duty and our interest, and to make those very things the instances of our obedience which are the natural means and causes of our happiness. The devil was so far in the right, when he charged Job that he did not *serve God for nought*. It is he himself that is the hard master, and makes men serve him for nought, who rewards his drudges and slaves with nothing but shame, and sorrow, and misery. But God requires no man's service upon hard and unreasonable terms. The greatest part of our work is a present reward to itself; and for whatever else we do or suffer

for

for him, he offers us abundant consideration. And if men did but truly and wisely love themselves, they would, upon this very ground, if there were no other, become religious. For, when all is done, there is no man can serve his own interest better than by serving God. Religion conduceth both to our present and future happiness. And when the gospel chargeth us with piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men, and temperance and chastity in reference to ourselves, the true interpretation of these laws is this, God requires of men, in order to their eternal happiness, that they should do those things which tend to their temporal welfare; that is, in plainer words, he promises to make us happy forever, upon condition that we will but do that which is best for ourselves in this world. To conclude, Religion is founded in the interest of men rightly apprehended. So that, if *the god of this world*, and the lusts of men, did not *blind their eyes*, so as to render them unfit to discern their true interest, it would be impossible, so long as men love themselves, and desire their own happiness, to keep them from being religious; for they could not but conclude that to be their interest; and, being so convinced, they would resolve to pursue it, and stick to it.

S E R M O N V.

The excellency of the Christian religion.

PHIL. iii. 8.

*a doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Apostle makes a comparison between the Jewish and the Christian religion, and shews the Christian to be in truth and substance what the Jewish was only in type and shadow:

3. *We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit.*

*spirit.* And then he enumerates the several privileges he was partaker of by virtue of his being born in the Jewish church, v. 4. 5. 6. *Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, &c.* And yet he tells us he was contented to forego all these advantages for Christ and the Christian religion, v. 7. *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.* And not only these, but if there were any thing else that men value in this world, he was willing to hazard that also upon the same account: v. 8. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*

In which words the Apostle declares the high esteem he had for the Christian religion, which he calls *the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord*; the excellency whereof appeared so great to him, that he valued nothing in comparison of the advantages which he had by the knowledge of it.

My design at this time from this text is, to represent the excellency of this knowledge of the Christian religion above that of any other religion or institution in the world. And here I shall not consider the external evidence which we have of the truth of Christianity, and of the divinity of its doctrine, in which respect it hath incomparably the advantage of any other religion; but only the internal excellency of the doctrine itself, abstracting from the divine authority of it; and that in these four respects.

1. As it does more clearly reveal to us the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all religion.

2. As it gives us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives.

3. As it propounds to us more powerful arguments to persuade men to the obedience of this law:

4. As it furnishes us with better motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of this life. Now, these are the greatest advantages that any religion can have; to give men right apprehensions of God, a perfect rule of good life, and efficacious arguments to persuade men to be good, and  
patiently

patiently to bear the evils and sufferings of this life. And these shall be the heads of my following discourse.

*First*, The Christian religion doth more clearly reveal to us the nature of God than any religion ever did. And to have right apprehensions of God, is the great foundation of all religion. For according as mens notions of God are, such will their religion be. If men have gross and false conceptions of God, their religion will be absurd and superstitious. If men fancy God to be an ill-natur'd being, armed with infinite power, one that delights in the misery and ruin of his creatures, and is ready to take all advantages against them; they may fear him, but they will hate him: and they will be apt to be such towards one another, as they fancy God to be towards them; for all religion doth naturally incline men to imitate him whom they worship.

Now, the Christian religion gives us a more perfect, and a more lovely character of God than any religion ever did. It represents him to us as a pure spirit, which the Heathens did not generally believe; and that he is to be worshipped in such a manner as is most suitable to his spiritual nature; which not only the Heathens, but even the Jews themselves were extremely mistaken about. *God is a spirit, (says our Saviour), and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* It is true indeed, God himself did command sacrifices to the Jews, and all those external and troublesome observances of which their religion did consist. But then it is to be considered, that he did not institute this way of worship because it was most suitable to his own nature, but because of the carnality of their hearts, and the proneness of that people to idolatry. God did not prescribe these things because they were best, but because the temper of that people would then admit of nothing better. And this the scripture gives us several intimations of: *Thou desirest not sacrifice, thou delightest not in burnt-offerings,* saith David, Psal. li. 16. And elsewhere, more expressly to this purpose: *I spake not unto your fathers, (says God, by the Prophet Jeremiah), nor commanded them in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices. But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice,* Jer. vii. 22.



23. A sufficient intimation, that God did not primarily intend to appoint this way of worship, and to impose it upon them, as that which was most proper and agreeable to him; but that he condescended to it as most accommodate to their present state and inclination. And in this sense also some understand what God says to the same people by the Prophet Ezekiel, that he *gave them statutes that were not good*, Ezek. xx. 25.

And as the Christian religion gives a more perfect, so a more amiable and lovely character of the divine nature. No religion that ever was in the world, does so fully represent the goodness of God, and his tender love to mankind; which is the best and most powerful argument to the love of God. The Heathens did generally dread God, and looked upon him as fierce, and cruel, and revengeful; and therefore they endeavoured to appease him by the horrid and barbarous sacrifices of men, and of their own children. And all along in the Old Testament, God is generally represented as very strict and severe. But there are no where so plain and full declarations of his mercy and love to the sons of men as are made in the gospel. In the Old Testament God is usually styled *The Lord of hosts; The great and the terrible God*: but in the New Testament, he is represented to us by milder titles, *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; The Father of mercies, and the God of all consolations; The God of all patience; The God of love and peace*: nay, he is said to be *love itself, and to dwell in love*. And this difference between the style of the Old and New Testament is so remarkable, that one of the greatest sects in the primitive church (I mean that of the Gnosticks) did upon this very ground found their heresy of two Gods; the one evil, and fierce, and cruel, whom they called the God of the Old Testament; the other good, and kind, and merciful, whom they called the God of the New. So great a difference is there between the representations which are made of God in the books of the Jewish and the Christian religion, as to give at least some colour and pretence for an imagination of two Gods.

*Secondly*, Christian religion hath given us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives. It hath made our duty more plain and certain in many instances,

instances, than either the philosophy of the Heathen, or the precepts of Moses, had done. It commands universal love, and kindness, and good-will among men; a readiness to forgive our greatest enemies; *to do good to them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us*: and does inculcate these precepts more vehemently, and forbid malice, and hatred, and revenge, and contention, more strictly and peremptorily, than any religion ever did before; as will appear to any one that does but attentively read our Saviour's sermon upon the mount.

And as Christianity hath given us a more certain, so likewise a more perfect law for the government of our lives. All the precepts of it are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties of us as are suitable to the light of nature, and do approve themselves to the best reason of mankind; such as have their foundation in the nature of God, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies; such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of goodness and virtue. The laws of our religion are such as are generally useful and beneficial to the world, as do tend to the outward peace and health, to the inward comfort and contentment, and to the universal happiness of mankind. They command nothing that is unnecessary and burdensome, as were the numerous rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion, but what is reasonable, and useful, and substantial; and they omit nothing that may tend to the glory of God, or the welfare of men; nor do they restrain us in any thing, but what is contrary, either to the regular inclinations of nature, or to our reason and true interest. They forbid us nothing but what is base and unworthy, to serve our humours and passions, to reproach our understandings, and to make ourselves fools and beasts; in a word, nothing but what tends either to our private harm and prejudice, or to public disorder and confusion.

And that this is the tenor of the laws of the gospel, will appear to any one from our Saviour's sermons and discourses; particularly that upon the mount; wherein he charges his disciples and followers to be humble, and meek, and righteous, and merciful, and pure, and peace-

able, and patient under sufferings and persecutions, and good and kind to all, even to those that are evil and injurious to us; and to endeavour to excel in all goodness and virtue. This will appear likewise from the writings of the holy Apostles. I will instance but in some few passages in them. St. Paul represents to us the design of the Christian doctrine in a very few words, but of admirable sense and weight: *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world,* Tit. ii. 11, 12. The same Apostle makes this the main and fundamental condition of the covenant of the gospel on our part: *Let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity,* 2. Tim. ii. 19. St. James describes the Christian doctrine, which he calls the *wisdom that is from above*, by these characters: *It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,* Jam. iii. 17. St. Peter calls the gospel, *the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby* (saith he) *are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,* 2 Pet. i, 3, 4. and upon this consideration he exhorts them, *to give all diligence to add to their faith the several virtues of a good life; without which he tells them they are barren and unfruitful—in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,* v. 5, 6, 7, 8. I will conclude with that full and comprehensive passage of St. Paul to the Philippians, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, (ὅσα σεμνὰ, whatsoever things are of venerable esteem), whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, (or chaste), whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things,* Phil. iv. 8.

But the perfection and the reasonableness of the laws of Christianity will most plainly appear, by taking a brief survey of them. And they may all be referred to these two general heads. They are either such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to make men singly and personally

personally good, or such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society.

I. Such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to make men good singly and personally considered: And the precepts of this kind may be distributed likewise into two sorts; such as enjoin piety towards God, or such as require the good order and government of ourselves in respect of the enjoyments and pleasures of this life.

1. Such as enjoin piety towards God. All the duties of Christian religion which respect God, are no other but what natural light prompts men to; excepting the two sacraments, which are of great use and significance in the Christian religion, and praying to God in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ. For the sum of natural religion, as it refers more immediately to God, is this, That we should inwardly reverence and love God; and that we should express our inward reverence and love to him, by external worship and adoration, and by our readiness to receive and obey all the revelations of his will; and that we should testify our dependence upon him, and our confidence of his goodness, by constant prayers and supplications to him for mercy and help for ourselves and others; and that we should acknowledge our obligations to him for the many favours and benefits which every day and every minute we receive from him, by continual praises and thanksgivings: and that, on the contrary, we should not entertain any unworthy thoughts of God, nor give that honour and reverence which is due to him, to any other; that we should not worship him in any manner, that is either unsuitable to the excellency and perfection of his nature, or contrary to his revealed will; that we should carefully avoid the profane and irreverent use of his name, by cursing, or customary swearing; and take heed of the neglect or contempt of his worship, or any thing belonging to it. This is the sum of the first part of natural religion; and these are the general heads of those duties which every man's reason tells him he owes to God: and these are the very things which the Christian religion does expressly require of us; as might be evidenced from particular texts in the New Testament. So that there is nothing in this

part of Christianity, but what agrees very well with the reason of mankind.

2. Such precepts as require the good order and government of ourselves in respect of the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. Christian religion commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste; all manner of sobriety, and temperance, and moderation, in reference to our appetites and passions; and forbids whatever is unnatural, and unreasonable, and unhealthful, in the use of pleasures, and of any of God's creatures. Hither belong all those texts which require of us, that we should *not walk after the flesh, but after the spirit*, Rom. viii. 1. that we should *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, 2 Cor. vii. 1. that we should *be holy in all manner of conversation*, 1 Pet. i. 15. St. John distributes the lusts and irregular appetites of men into three kinds; voluptuousness, covetousness, and ambition; answerable to the three sorts of tempting objects that are in the world; pleasures, riches, and honours: *All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, &c.* 1 John ii. 16. And Christianity doth strictly forbid all these: *Take heed, and beware of covetousness*, (says our Saviour; and he adds this excellent reason), *for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*, Luke xii. 15. It forbids pride, and ambition, and vain-glory; and commands humility, and modesty, and condescension to others: *Learn of me*, (says our Saviour), *for I am meek and lowly in spirit*, Matt. xi. 29. *Mind not high things, but condescend to them that are of low degree*, Rom. xii. 16. *Let nothing be done through vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*, Phil. ii. 3. And in reference to sensual pleasures, it forbids all irregularity and excess; and strictly enjoins purity and temperance; cautioning us, *to take heed lest we be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness*, Luke xxi. 34. charging us, *to walk decently as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness*, Rom. xiii. 13. *to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*, 1 Pet. ii. 11. Now, all these precepts do not only tend to beget in us such virtues and dispositions as are reasonable, and suitable to our nature, and every way for our temporal

temporal convenience and advantage, but such as do likewise exceedingly dispose us to piety and religion, by purifying our souls from the dross and filth of sensual delights: for covetousness debaseth a man's spirit, and sinks it into the earth; intemperance and lust cloud a man's understanding, and indispose it for the contemplation of things spiritual and divine.

Thus you see how the precepts of Christianity do tend to the perfection of human nature, considering men singly and personally.

II. The other sort of precepts are such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society. And the reason of mankind can devise nothing more proper to this end, than the laws of Christianity are; for they command all those virtues which are apt to sweeten the spirits, and allay the passions and animosities of men one towards another. They require us *to love our neighbours* (that is, every man in the world, even our greatest enemies) *as ourselves*. And for this end, among others, was the sacrament of the Lord's supper, the feast of love, instituted; that, by commemorating the love of our dying Saviour, who laid down his life for his enemies, we might be put in mind how we ought to love one another.

And by this law of loving all men, even our enemies, the Christian religion discovers itself, not only to be the most innocent and harmless, but the most generous and best-natured institution that ever was in the world: for, in pursuance of this general precept, it commands us, *to do good to all men; if it be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men; to be kind one to another, ready to gratify and oblige men; to be tender hearted and compassionate towards those that are in want or misery, and ready to supply and relieve them; to sympathise with one another in our joys and sorrows; to mourn with those that mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice, to bear one another's burdens, and to forbear one another in love; to be easily reconciled to them that have offended us; and to be ready to forgive from our hearts the greatest injuries that can be done to us; and that without bounds and limits, even to seventy times seven, as our Saviour expresseth it.*

The laws of Christianity do likewise secure both the private interests of men, and the public peace, by confirming and enforcing all the dictates of nature concerning justice and equity, and our doing to others as we would have them to do to us; and by commanding obedience to human laws, which decide men's rights, and submission to government, under pain of damnation: and by forbidding whatever is contrary to these: violence and oppression, defrauding and over-reaching one another; perfidiousness and treachery, breach of trust, oaths, or promises, undutifulness to superiors, sedition and rebellion against magistracy and authority; and if there be any thing else that is apt to disturb the peace of the world, and to alienate the affections of men from one another, as sowerness of disposition, and rudeness of behaviour, censoriousness, and sinister interpretation of things, all cross and distasteful humours, and whatever else may render the conversation of men grievous and uneasy to one another: all these are either expressly, or by clear consequence and deduction, forbidden in the New Testament.

And now what could any religion do more towards the reforming of the dispositions and manners of men? What laws can be devised more proper and effectual to advance the nature of man to its highest perfection, to procure the tranquillity of mens minds, and the peace and happiness of the world, than these precepts of Christianity are? Several of which, as those of loving our enemies, of not revenging injuries, of rendering good for evil, &c. though they have been esteemed reasonable by some of the wisest among the Heathen; yet, by reason of the degeneracy of the world, and of the obscurity and uncertainty of human reason, they never obtained to have the estimation and force of natural laws. So that we owe to Christianity the discovery of the most certain and perfect rule of life that ever the world was acquainted withal.

*Thirdly*, Christian religion propounds the most powerful arguments to persuade men to the obedience of these laws. The gospel offers such considerations to us as are fit to work very forcibly upon two of the most swaying and governing passions in the mind of man; our hopes,



hopes, and our fears. To encourage our hopes, it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in case of obedience; and, to awaken our fear, it threatens sinners with the most dreadful and durable torments, in case of disobedience. *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, it promiseth eternal life: but unto them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, it threatens indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish,* Rom. ii. 7. 8. 9. And this is that which makes the doctrine of the gospel so powerful an instrument for the reforming of the world, that it proposes to men such glorious rewards, and such terrible punishments, as no religion ever did; and, to make the consideration of them more effectual, it gives us far greater assurance of the reality and certainty of these things, than ever the world had before. This account the Apostle gives us of the success and efficacy of the gospel upon the minds of men; and for this reason he calls it *the power of God unto salvation*, because therein *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men*, Rom. i. 16. 18. Before the revelation of the gospel, the wickedness and impenitency of the Heathen world was a much more excusable thing; because they were in a great measure ignorant of the rewards of another life, and had generally but very uncertain and obscure apprehensions of those things which urge men most powerfully to forsake their sins, and are the most prevalent arguments to a good life. So St. Paul tells the Athenians, the most knowing among the Heathen: *The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead,* Acts xvii. 30. 31. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, hath given the world that full assurance of another life after this, and of a future judgment, which it never had before; for he whom God raised from the dead, did declare and testify, that *it was he who was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead,* Acts x. 42. And the firm belief of a

future

future judgment, which shall render to every man according to his deeds, if it be well considered, is to a reasonable nature the most forcible motive of all other to a good life; because it is taken from the consideration of the greatest and most lasting happiness and misery that human nature is capable of. So that the laws of Christianity have the firmest sanction of any laws in the world, to secure the obedience and observance of them: for what can restrain men from sin, if the terrors of the Lord; and the evident danger of eternal destruction, will not? what encouragement can be given to goodness beyond the hopes of heaven, and the assurance of an endless felicity?

*Fourthly,* The Christian religion furnisheth us with the best motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of this life. This was one great design of philosophy, to support men under the evils and calamities which this life is incident to, and to fortify their spirits against sufferings. And to this end, the wisest among the Heathens racked their wits; and cast about every way; they advanced all sorts of principles, and managed every little argument and consideration to the utmost advantage: and yet, after all these attempts, they have not been able to give any considerable comfort and ease to the mind of man under any of the great evils and pressures of this life: *The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself upon it, and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.* All the wise sayings and advices which philosophers could muster up to this purpose, have proved ineffectual to the common people, and the generality of mankind; and have helped only to support some few stout and obstinate minds, which, without the assistance of philosophy, would have held up pretty well of themselves.

Some of the philosophers have run so far back for arguments of comfort against pain, as to call every thing into question, and to doubt whether there were any such thing as sense or pain. And yet for all that; when any great evil has been upon them, they would certainly sigh and groan as pitifully, and cry out as loud, as other men.

Others have sought to ease themselves of the evil of affliction, by disputing subtilly against it; and pertinaciously

ously maintaining that afflictions are no real evils, but only in opinion and imagination; and therefore a wise man ought not to be troubled at them. But he must be a very wise man that can forbear being troubled at things that are very troublesome. And yet thus Possidonius, as Tully tells us, distinguished. He could not deny pain to be very troublesome; but for all that he was resolved never to acknowledge it to be an evil. But sure, it is a very slender comfort that relies upon this nice distinction, between things being troublesome and being evils, when all the evil of affliction lies in the trouble it creates to us. But when the best that can be is made of this argument, it is good for nothing, but to be thrown away as a stupid paradox, and against the common sense of mankind.

Others have endeavoured to delude their trouble by a graver way of reasoning, That these things are fatal and necessary; and therefore no body ought to be troubled at them, it being in vain to be troubled at that which we cannot help. And yet perhaps it might as reasonably be said on the other side, that this very consideration, that a thing cannot be helped, is one of the justest causes of trouble to a wise man. For it were some kind of comfort, if these evils were to be avoided; because then we might be careful to prevent them another time: but if they be necessary, then my trouble is as fatal as the calamity that occasions it; and though I know it is in vain to be troubled for that which I cannot help, yet I cannot chuse but be afflicted. It was a smart reply that Augustus made to one that ministered this comfort to him of the fatality of things: *Hoc ipsum est (says he) quod me male habet*: This was so far from giving any ease to his mind, that "this was the very thing that troubled him."

Others have tried to divert and entertain the troubles of other men by pretty and plausible sayings, such as this, That if evils are long, they are but light; if sharp, but short; and a hundred such like. Now, I am apt to imagine, that it is but very small comfort that a plain and ordinary man, lying under a sharp fit of the stone for a week together, receives from this fine sentence. For what pleasure soever men that are at ease and leisure may take in being the authors of witty sayings, I doubt it is but

poor

poor consolation that a man under great and stinging afflictions finds from them.

The best moral argument to patience, in my opinion, is, the advantage of patience itself. To bear evils as quietly as we can, is the way to make them lighter and easier. But to toss and fling, and to be restless, is good for nothing, but to fret and enrage our pain, to gall our sores, and to make the burden that is upon us sit more uneasy. But this is properly no consideration of comfort, but an art of managing ourselves under afflictions, so as not to make them more grievous than indeed they are.

But now the arguments which Christianity propounds to us, are such as are a just and reasonable encouragement to men to bear sufferings patiently. Our religion sets before us, not the example of a stupid stoick, who had, by obstinate principles, hardened himself against all sense of pain beyond the common measures of humanity; but an example that lies level to all mankind, of a man like ourselves, that had a tender sense of the least suffering, and yet patiently endured the greatest; of *Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God,* Heb. xii. 2.

God thought it expedient that the first Christians should, by great hardships and persecutions, be trained up for glory, and to animate and encourage them hereto, the *captain of our salvation was crowned by sufferings,* Heb. ii. 10. Much more should the consideration of this pattern arm us with patience against the common and ordinary calamities of this life, especially if we consider his example with this advantage, that though his sufferings were wholly undeserved, and not for himself, but for us, yet he bore them patiently.

But the main consideration of all is, the glory which shall follow our sufferings as the reward of them, if they be for God and his cause; and if upon any other innocent account, as a reward of our patience: *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* 2 Cor. iv. 17. Christian religion hath secured us that we shall be infinite gainers by our sufferings. And who would not be content

tent to suffer upon terms of such advantage? *to pass through many tribulations into the kingdom of God?* and to endure a short affliction for an endless happiness? The assurance of a future blessedness is a cordial that will revive our spirits more in the day of adversity than all the wise sayings and considerations of philosophy.

These are the arguments which Christianity propounds to us; and they are firm and sound at the bottom. They have strength and substance in them, and are apt to work upon human nature; and the most ordinary understanding is capable of the force of them. In the strength and virtue of this great example, and in contemplation of this glorious reward, with what resolution and cheerfulness, with what courage and patience, did vast numbers of all sorts of people, in the first ages of Christianity; not only men, but women; not only those of greater spirit and more generous education, but those of the poorest and lowest condition; not only the learned and the wise, but the ignorant and illiterate, encounter all the rage and malice of the world, and embrace torments and death? Had the precepts and counsels of philosophy ever any such effect upon the minds of men? I will conclude this with a passage in the life of Lipsius, who was a great studier and admirer of the Stoical philosophy. When he lay upon his death-bed, and one of his friends who came to visit him told him, that he needed not use arguments to persuade him to patience under his pains, the philosophy which he had studied so much would furnish him with motives enough to that purpose, he answers him with this ejaculation: *Domine Jesu, da mihi patientiam Christianam*: "Lord Jesus, give me Christian patience." No patience like to that which the considerations of Christianity are apt to work in us.

And now I have, as briefly and plainly as I could, endeavoured to represent to you the excellency of the Christian religion; both in respect of the clear discoveries which it makes to us of the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all religion; and likewise in respect of the perfection of its laws, and the power of its arguments, to persuade men both to obey and suffer the will of God. By which you may see what the proper tendency and design of this religion is, and what the

laws and precepts of it would make men, if they would truly observe them, and live according to them; substantially religious towards God, chaste and temperate, patient and contented in reference to themselves, and the dispensation of God's providence towards them, just and honest, kind and peaceable, and good-natured towards all men. In a word, the gospel describes God to us in all respects such a one as we would wish him to be; gives us such laws as every man that understands himself would chuse to live by; propounds such arguments to persuade to the obedience of these laws as no man that wisely loves himself, and hath any tenderness for his own interest and happiness, either in this world or the other, can refuse to be moved withal.

And now, methinks, I may with some confidence challenge any religion in the world to shew such a complete body and collection of holy and reasonable laws, established upon such promises and threatnings as the gospel contains. And if any man can produce a religion that can reasonably pretend to an equal or a greater confirmation than the gospel hath; a religion, the precepts, and promises, and threatnings whereof are calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just, than the laws and motives of Christianity are apt to make men; if any man can produce such a religion, I am ready to be of it. Let but any man shew me any book in the world, the doctrines whereof have the seal of such miracles as the doctrine of the scriptures hath; a book which contains the heads of our duty so perfectly, and without the mixture of any thing that is unreasonable, or vicious, or anyways unworthy of God; that commands us every thing in reason necessary to be done, and abridgeth us of no lawful pleasure without offering us abundant recompence for our present self-denial; a book, the rules whereof, if they were practised, would make men more pious and devout, more holy and sober, more just and fair in their dealings, better friends and better neighbours, better magistrates and better subjects, and better in all relations, and which does offer to the understanding of men more powerful arguments to persuade them to be all this: let any man, I say,

say, shew me such a book, and I will lay aside the scripture, and preach out of that.

And do we not all profess to be of this excellent religion, and to study and believe this holy book of the scriptures? But, alas! who will believe that we do so, that shall look upon the actions, and consider the lives of the greatest part of Christians? How grossly and openly do many of us contradict the plain precepts of the gospel, by our ungodliness and worldly lusts, by living intemperately, or unjustly, or profanely in this present world? as if *the grace of God which bringeth salvation* had never appeared to us; as if we had never heard of heaven or hell, or believed not one word that the scripture says concerning them; as if we were in no expectation of *the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*; whom God hath appointed to judge the world in righteousness, and who will bestow mighty rewards upon those who faithfully serve him; but will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us not then deceive ourselves, by pretending to this excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, if we do not frame our lives according to it. For though we know these things never so well, yet we are not happy unless we do them: nay, we are but the more miserable for knowing them, if we do them not. Therefore it concerns every one of us to consider seriously what we believe, and whether our belief of the Christian religion hath its due effect upon our lives. If not, all the precepts, and promises, and threatnings of the gospel, will rise up in judgment against us, and the articles of our faith will be so many articles of accusation: and the great weight of our charge will be this, that we did not obey that gospel which we professed to believe; that we made confession of the Christian faith, but lived like Heathens. Not to believe the Christian religion, after so great evidence and confirmation as God hath given to it, is very unreasonable; but to believe it to be true, and yet to live as if it were false, is the greatest repugnancy and contradiction that can be. He that does not believe Christianity, either hath, or thinks



he hath some reason for with-holding his assent from it; but he that believes it, and yet lives contrary to it, knows that he hath no reason for what he does, and is convinced that he ought to do otherwise. And he is a miserable man indeed that does those things, for the doing of which he continually stands condemned by his own mind. And accordingly God will deal more severely with such persons. He will pardon a thousand defects in our understandings, if they do not proceed from gross carelessness and neglect of ourselves; but the faults of our wills have no excuse; because we knew to do better, and were convinced in our minds that we ought not to have done so.

Dost thou believe, that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men?* and dost thou still allow thyself in *ungodliness and worldly lusts?* Art thou convinced that *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord?* and dost thou still persist in a wicked course? Art thou fully persuaded that *no whoremonger, nor adulterer, nor covetous, nor unrighteous persons, shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ?* and dost thou for all that continue to practise these vices? What canst thou say, man, why it should not be to thee according to thy faith? If it so fall out, that thou art miserable, and undone for ever, thou hast no reason to be surpris'd, as if some unexpected thing had happened to thee. It is but with thee just as thou believedst it would be when thou didst these things. For how couldst thou expect that God should accept of thy good belief, when thou didst so notoriously contradict it by a bad life? How couldst thou look for other, but that God should condemn thee for the doing of those things for which thine own conscience did condemn thee all the while thou wast doing of them? When we come into the other world, there is no consideration that will sting our consciences more cruelly than this, that we did wickedly when we knew to have done better, and chose to make ourselves miserable when we understood the way to have been happy. To conclude, we Christians have certainly the best and the holiest, the wisest and most reasonable religion in the world; but then we are in the worst condition of all mankind,

mankind, if the best religion in the world do not make us good.

S E R M O N VI.

The precepts of Christianity not grievous.

I JOHN, v. 3.

— *And his commandments are not grievous.*

**O**NE of the great prejudices which men have entertained against the Christian religion, is this, that it lays upon men *heavy burdens, and grievous to be born*; that the laws of it are very strict and severe, difficult to be kept, and yet dangerous to be broken; that it requires us to govern and keep under our passions, and to contradict many times our strongest inclinations and desires; *to cut off our right-hand, and to pluck out our right eye; to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us; to forgive the greatest injuries that are done to us, and to make reparation for the least that we do to others; to be contented with our condition, patient under sufferings, and ready to sacrifice our dearest interests in this world, and even our very lives, in the cause of God and religion.* All these seem to be *hard sayings, and grievous commandments.*

For the removal of this prejudice, I have chosen these words of the Apostle, which expressly tell us the contrary, that *the commandments of God are not grievous.*

And though this be a great truth, if it be impartially considered; yet it is also a great paradox to men of corrupt minds and vicious practices, who are prejudiced against religion, and the holy laws of God, by their interest and their lusts. This seems a strange proposition to those who look upon religion at a distance, and never

tried the experiment of a holy life ; who measure the laws of God, not by the intrinsical goodness and equity of them, but by the reluctancy and opposition which they find in their own hearts against them.

Upon this account it will be requisite to take some pains to satisfy the reason of men concerning this truth ; and, if it be possible, to make it so evident, that those who are unwilling to own it, may yet be ashamed to deny it. And methinks I have this peculiar advantage in the argument I have now undertaken, that every reasonable man cannot chuse but wish me success in this attempt ; because I undertake the proof of that which it is every man's interest that it should be true : and if I can make it out, this pretence against religion will not only be baffled, but we shall gain a new and forcible argument to persuade men over to it.

Now, the easiness or difficulty of the observation of any laws or commands depends chiefly upon these three things.

1. Upon the nature of the laws themselves, and their suitableness or unsuitableness to those to whom they are given.

2. Upon the ability or weakness of those on whom these laws are imposed for the keeping of them. For easiness and difficulty are relative terms, and refer to some power ; and a thing may be difficult to a weak man, which yet may be easy to the same person when assisted with a greater strength.

3. Upon the encouragement that is given to the observation of them. For the proposal of great rewards does very much qualify and allay the difficulty of any undertaking.

Now, if I can make these three things evident ; 1. That the laws of God are reasonable, that is, suitable to our nature, and advantageous to our interest ; 2. That we are not destitute of sufficient power and ability for the performance of them ; and, 3. That we have the greatest encouragements to this purpose : then have we all imaginable reason to assent to the truth of this proposition, That *the commandments of God are not grievous.*

I. The laws of God are reasonable ; that is, suitable to

to our nature, and advantageous to our interest. It is true, God hath a sovereign right over us as we are his creatures, and by virtue of this right he might without injustice have imposed difficult tasks upon us, and have required hard things at our hands: but in making laws for us, he hath not made use of this right. He hath commanded us nothing in the gospel, that is either unsuitable to our reason, or prejudicial to our interest; nay, nothing that is severe, and against the grain of our nature, but when either the apparent necessity of our interest does require it, or an extraordinary reward is promised to our obedience. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This is the sum of the natural law, That we should behave ourselves reverently and obediently towards the divine Majesty, and justly and charitably towards men; and that, in order to the fitting of us for the better discharge of these duties, we should govern ourselves in the use of sensual delights with temperance and moderation. And if we go over the laws of Christianity, we shall find, that, excepting a very few particulars, they enjoin the very same things; only they have made our duty more clear and certain. But this I have had occasion to make out largely in the foregoing discourse, and therefore I shall say the less to it now.

As to the several parts of God's worship and service, prayer and thanksgiving, hearing and reading the word of God, and receiving of the sacrament; these are all no less for our own comfort and advantage, than for the honour of God and religion. And there is nothing of difficulty or trouble in the external performance of them, but what hypocrisy can make tolerable to itself: and certainly they must be not only much more easy, but even delightful, when they are directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections.

As for those laws of religion which concern our duty to ourselves, as temperance and chastity; or to others, as the several branches of justice and charity, comprehended in those general rules, *of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and of doing to others as we would have them*

*to do to us*: there is nothing in all these laws but what is most reasonable, and fit to be done by us; nothing but what, if we were to consult our own interest and happiness, and did rightly understand ourselves, we would chuse for ourselves; nothing but what is easy to be understood, and as easy to be practised by an honest and a willing mind.

Now, the practice of all these is suitable to our nature, and agreeable to the frame of our understandings; proper to our condition and circumstances in this world, and preparatory to our happiness in the next. And no man's reason did ever dictate to him the contrary of any of these; that it is fit for a creature not to love God, to be undutiful to his great sovereign, and ungrateful to his best benefactor; that it is reasonable for a man to debauch himself by intemperance and brutish sensuality; to hate, defraud, and oppress other men. Our very natural reason, if we will but listen to the dictates of it, is an enemy to all these sins, and a law against all these vices.

And as the practice of all piety and virtue is agreeable to our reason, so it is likewise for the interest of mankind, both of private persons, and of public societies, as I have already shewn. Some virtues plainly tend to the preservation of our health, others to the improvement and security of our estates, all to the peace and quiet of our minds; and, which is somewhat more strange, to the advancement of our esteem and reputation. For though the world be generally bad, and men are apt to approve nothing so much as what they do themselves; yet, I know not how it comes to pass, men are commonly so just to virtue and goodness, as to praise it in others even when they do not practise it themselves.

And as for those precepts of Christianity which seem to be most harsh and difficult at first appearance, as repentance and restitution, mortification of our lusts and passions, humility, patience and contentedness with our condition, and resignation of ourselves to the will of God, forgiving and loving our enemies, and self-denial for the cause of God and religion; if we look well into them, and consider thoroughly the nature and tendency of them, even these will appear to be both reasonable

able in themselves, and upon one account or other really for our advantage.

What more reasonable than repentance ; than that a man, when he hath done amiss, and contrary to his duty, should be heartily sorry for it, and resolve to do so no more ? And how grievous soever it be, it is necessary, being the only way to pardon and peace. And in case our offence against God hath been complicated with injury to men, it is but reasonable we should make restitution as far as we are able, according to the nature of the injury. For without this our repentance is not real ; because we have not done what we can to undo our fault as much as we can, or at least to hinder the injurious consequences of it from proceeding any farther : nor can any man be judged to be truly sorry for his sin that retains the profit and advantages of it to himself. Besides, that till reparation be made to the utmost of our power, we can have no peace in our own consciences, nor any well grounded hopes of forgiveness from God.

Mortification of our lusts and passions, though, like repentance, it has something in it that is troublesome, yet nothing that is unreasonable, or really to our prejudice. If we give way to our passions, we do but gratify ourselves for the present, in order to our future disquiet ; but if we resist and conquer them, we lay the foundation of perpetual peace and tranquillity in our minds. If we govern ourselves in the use of sensual delights by the laws of God and reason, we shall find ourselves more at ease than if we should let loose the reins to our appetites and lusts : for the more we gratify our lusts, the more craving they will be, and the more impatient of denial. *Crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops* : “ Every lust is a kind of hydropic distemper ; and the more we drink, the more we shall thirst.” So that, by retrenching our inordinate desires, we do not rob ourselves of any true pleasure, but only prevent the pain and trouble of farther dissatisfaction.

Humility, though it may seem to expose a man to some contempt, yet it is truly the readiest way to honour ; as, on the contrary, pride is a most improper and absurd means for the accomplishing of the end it aims at. All other vices do in some measure attain their end. Covetousness

ousness does usually raise an estate, and ambitious endeavours do often advance men to high places; but pride, and insolence, and contempt of others, do infallibly defeat their own design. They aim at respect and esteem, but never attain it; for all mankind do naturally hate and slight a proud man.

What more reasonable than patience and contentedness; and that we should in all things resign up ourselves to the will of God, who loves us as well as we do ourselves, and knows what is good for us better than we do ourselves? This certainly is the best way to prevent anxiety and perplexity of mind, and to make the worst condition as tolerable as it can be, and much more easy than it would be otherwise.

As for that peculiar law of Christianity which forbids revenge, and commands us to forgive injuries, and to love our enemies, no man can think it grievous who considers the pleasure and sweetness of love, and the glorious victory of overcoming evil with good, and then compares these with the restless torment and perpetual tumults of a malicious and revengeful spirit.

And, lastly, self-denial for the cause of God and religion; this is neither unreasonable, nor to our disadvantage. If we consider our infinite obligations to God, we have no reason to think much to sacrifice to him our dearest interests in this world; especially if we consider withal how disproportionably great the reward of our sufferings shall be in another world. Besides that the interest of religion is of so great concernment to the happiness of mankind, that every man is bound for that reason to assert the truth of it with the hazard of any thing that is most valuable to him in this world.

II. We are not destitute of sufficient power and strength for the performing of God's commands. Had God given us laws, but no power to keep them, his commandments would then indeed have been grievous. It is true, we have contracted a great deal of weakness and impotency by our wilful degeneracy from goodness; but that grace which the gospel offers to us for our assistance is sufficient for us. And this seems to be the particular reason why the Apostle says here in the text, that *his commandments are not grievous*; because he offers us an  
assistance



assistance proportionable to the difficulty of his commands, and the necessity of our condition: for it follows immediately after the text, *For whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world.* Therefore the commandments of God are not grievous; because every child of God, that is, every Christian, is endued with a power whereby he is enabled to resist and conquer the temptations of the world. The same Apostle elsewhere encourages Christians upon the same consideration: *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* Though we be encompassed with many and potent enemies, who make it their business to tempt and to deter us from our duty; yet our case is not hard, so long as we have a greater strength on our side. And this the Apostle tells us is the case of every Christian: *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,* 1 John, iv. 4. Are there legions of devils who are continually designing and working our ruin? there are also myriads of good angels, who are more chearful and officious to do us good. For I doubt not, but as those who are bent to do wickedly will never want tempters to urge them on, and to push them forward in an evil course; so, on the other hand, those who apply themselves seriously to the business of religion, and yield themselves tractable to good motions, will find the good Spirit of God more ready and active to encourage them than the devil can be to pull them back; unless we think that God hath given a greater power and a larger commission to the devil to do men mischief, than to his Holy Spirit and his holy angels for our assistance and encouragement. But then we are to understand, that this assistance is only offered to men, and not forced upon them whether they will or no. For if we beg God's grace, but neglect to make use of it; if we implore his assistance for the mortifying of our lusts, but will not contribute our own endeavours, God will withdraw his grace, and take away his Holy Spirit from us: nay, if, after we have begun well, we do notoriously slacken our endeavours, we forfeit the divine assistance. If when by God's grace we have in a good measure conquered the first difficulties of religion, and gained some habitual strength against sin; if after this we grow careless and remiss, and neglect our guard, and lay ourselves open

open to temptations, God's Spirit will not always strive with us. Notwithstanding all the promises of the gospel, and the mighty assistances there offered to us, if we love any lust, and will, with Samson, lay our head in Delilah's lap, we shall be insensibly robbed of *our strength, and become like other men.*

III. We have the greatest encouragement to the observance of God's commands. Two things make any course of life easy; present pleasure, and the assurance of a future reward. Religion gives part of its reward in hand, the present comfort and satisfaction of having done our duty; and for the rest, it offers us the best security that heaven can give. Now, these two must needs make our duty very easy; a considerable reward in hand, and not only the hopes, but the assurance of a far greater recompence hereafter.

I. Present peace and satisfaction of mind, and inexpressible joy and pleasure, flowing from the testimony of a good conscience. This is present payment, besides that it is the earnest of a future and greater happiness. And this does naturally spring up in the mind of a good man: *Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.* All acts of piety and virtue are not only delightful for the present, but they leave peace and contentment behind them; a peace that no outward violence can interrupt or take from us. The pleasures of a holy life have, moreover, this peculiar advantage of all worldly joys, that we shall never be weary of them; we cannot be cloyed by the frequent repetition of these pleasures, nor by the long enjoyment of them. I know that some vices pretend to bring great pleasure along with them; and that the delights of a sensual and voluptuous life make a glorious show, and are attended with much pomp and noise; like the sports of children and fools, which are loud and clamorous; or, as Solomon elegantly compares them, *like the crackling of thorns under a pot,* which makes a little noise, and a sudden blaze, that is presently over. But the serious and the manly pleasures, the solid and substantial joys, are only to be found in the ways of religion and virtue. The most sensual man that ever was in the world never felt his heart touched with so delicious and lasting a pleasure, as that is which springs from

from a clear conscience, and a mind fully satisfied with its own actions.

2. But the great encouragement of all is, the assurance of a future reward; the firm persuasion whereof is enough to raise us above any thing in this world, and to animate us with courage and resolution against the greatest difficulties. So the Apostle reasons: *His commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* The belief of a future happiness and glory was that which made the primitive Christians so victorious over the world, and gave them the courage to resist all the pleasures and terrors of sense. It cannot be denied, but that a religious course of life is liable to be incumbered with many difficulties, which are naturally grievous to flesh and blood. But a Christian is able to comfort himself under all these with the thoughts of his end, *which is everlasting life.* He considers the goodness of God, which he believes would not deny him the free enjoyment of the things of this world, were it not that he hath such joys and pleasures in store for him as will abundantly recompense his present self-denial and sufferings.

Let us now put both these together, the pleasures of religion, and the rewards of it, and they cannot but appear to be a mighty encouragement. With what pleasure does a man that lives a holy and a virtuous life despise the pleasures of sin, and, notwithstanding all the allurements of sense, persist resolutely in his course? And how is such a man confirmed in his purpose, and animated in his holy resolution, when he finds that God and his own conscience do applaud his choice; when all along, in the course of religion and a virtuous life, in his conflicts with sin, and resistance of temptations, he hath for his present reward the two great pleasures of innocence and of victory, and for his future encouragement the joyful hopes of a crown and a kingdom? A recompence so great, as is sufficient to make a lame man walk, enough to make any one willing to offer violence to his strongest passions and inclinations. A man would be content to strive with himself, and to conflict with great difficulties, in hopes of a mighty reward. What poor

man would not cheerfully carry a great burden of gold and silver, that were assured to have the greatest share of it for his pains, and thereby to be made a man for ever? Whatever difficulties religion is attended withal, they are all sweetened and made easy by the proposal of a great and eternal reward.

But are there no difficulties then in religion? Is every thing so plain and easy? Are all the ways of virtue so smooth and even as we have here represented them? Hath not our Saviour told us, that *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it?* Matth. vii. 14. Does not the Apostle say, *That through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God?* Acts xiv. 22. and *that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution?* 2 Tim. iii. 12. And does not the scripture every where speak of *striving, and wrestling, and running, and fighting; of labouring, and watching, and giving all diligence?* And is there nothing grievous in all this?

This is a very material objection, and therefore I shall be the more careful to give a satisfactory answer to it. And that I may do it the more distinctly, be pleased to consider these six things. 1. That the suffering of persecution for religion is an extraordinary case, which did chiefly concern the first ages of Christianity. 2. That this discourse, concerning the easiness of God's commands, does all along suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the entrance upon a religious course. 3. Nor is there any reason it should exclude our after-care and diligence. 4. All the difficulties of religion are very much mitigated and allayed by hope and by love. 5. There is incomparably more difficulty and trouble in the ways of sin and vice, than in the ways of religion and virtue. 6. If we do but put virtue and vice, a religious and a wicked course of life, in equal circumstances; if we will but suppose a man as much accustomed and inured to the one, as he has been to the other: then I shall not doubt to pronounce, that the advantages of ease and pleasure will be found to be on the side of religion.

1. The suffering of persecution for religion is an extraordinary case, and did chiefly concern the first ages of Christianity. And therefore the general sayings of our Saviour

Saviour and his Apostles concerning the persecuted state of Christians, are to be limited, as doubtless they were intended, principally to those first times, and by no means to be equally extended to all ages of the church. At first, indeed, whoever embraced the profession of Christianity, did thereby expose themselves to all the sufferings which the power and malice of the world could afflict them withal; but since *the kingdoms of the earth became the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ*, and the governors of the world began to be patrons of the church, it is so far from being universally true, that every Christian hath suffered the violence of persecution, that it hath been a rare case, and happened only in some few ages, and to some persons: so that this is accidental to a state of religion, and therefore ought not to be reckoned among the ordinary difficulties of it. And when it happens, God gives extraordinary supports, and promises mighty rewards to make it tolerable.

2. This discourse, concerning the easiness of God's commands, does all along suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious course, except only in those persons who have had the happiness to be trained up to religion, by the easy and insensible degrees of a pious and virtuous education. These indeed are freed from a great deal of pains and difficulty, which others, who are reclaimed from a bad course of life, must expect to undergo. They are in a great measure excused from the pangs of the new birth, from the pains of a sudden and violent change, from the terrors of an affrighted mind, and from the deep and piercing sorrows of a more solemn repentance. Whereas those who have lived wickedly before, must look to meet with a great deal more trouble; because they are put upon changing the whole course of their life at once, and must contend with inveterate habits; and offer no small violence to themselves in plucking up those vices which have been rooted in them by long custom and continuance. This indeed is grievous, and must needs be sensibly painful, like the *plucking out of a right eye*, or the *cutting off a right hand*: for in this case a man must strive against the very bent and inclination of his strongest appetites, against the tyranny of custom, and the mighty power of

a second nature. But this is no just reflexion upon religion; because this does not proceed from the nature of God's laws, but from an accidental indisposition in ourselves, which religion is apt to remove: and if we will but allow some time of trouble and uneasiness for the cure, when that is once wrought, the commands of God will be more easy and delightful to us than ever our sins and lusts were.

3. Nor does this exclude our after-care and diligence. For when the Apostle says, that *the commandments of God are not grievous*, he does by no means intend to insinuate, that they are calculated for slothful and lazy persons, that they are so easy as to require no industry and endeavour on our part: he only aims to prevent a tacit objection, which lies at the bottom of many mens hearts, as if religion were a most grievous and intolerable burden, and there were more trouble, and less pleasure in it, than in any other action of human life. This he utterly denies; but does not hereby intend to exclude such diligence and industry as men use about other matters. And if I should tell you, that the business of religion does not require a very vigorous prosecution and great earnestness of endeavour, I should speak quite besides the holy scriptures; which so frequently command *seeking* and *striving*, and *labouring*; besides many other such phrases, that import diligence and earnestness. And indeed it were unfit that so excellent and glorious a reward as the gospel promises, should stoop down like fruit upon a full-laden bough, to be plucked by every idle and wanton hand; that heaven should be prostituted to the lazy desires and faint wishes, to the cheap and ordinary endeavours of slothful men. God will not so much disparage eternal life and happiness, as to bestow it upon those who have conceived so low an opinion of it, as not to think it worth the labouring for. And, surely this is sufficient to recommend religion to any considerate man, if the advantages of it be much greater than of any worldly design that we can propound to ourselves and the difficulties of it not greater. If the same seriousness, and industry of endeavour, which men commonly use, to raise a fortune, and advance themselves in the world, will serve to make a man a good man, and to  
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bring him to heaven, what reason hath any man to complain of the hard terms of religion? And I think I may truly say, that usually less than this does it: for God considers our condition in this world, and the pressing necessities of this life; that we are flesh, as well as spirit; and that we have great need of these things; and therefore he allows us to be very sedulous and industrious about them. However, this I am sure of, that if men would be as serious to save their immortal souls, as they are to support these dying bodies; if they would but provide for eternity with the same solicitude and real care as they do for this life; if they would but seek heaven with the same ardour of affection, and vigour of prosecution, as they seek earthly things; if they would but love God as much as many men do the world, and mind godliness as much as men usually do gain; if they would but go to church with as good a will as men ordinarily do to their markets and fairs, and be in as good earnest at their devotions as men commonly are in driving a bargain; if they would but endure some troubles and inconveniencies in the ways of religion, with the same patience and constancy as they can do storms, and foul ways and mischances, when they are travelling about their worldly occasions; if they would but avoid bad company, as men use to do cheaters, and reject the temptations of the devil and the world, as they would do the kind words and insinuations of a man whom they verily believe to have a design to over-reach them: I am confident that such a one could not fail of heaven; and would be much surer of it upon these terms, than any man that doth all the other things could be of getting an estate, or of attaining any thing in this world.

And cannot every man do thus much? All that I have said signifies no more, but that men should use their sincere endeavours. And this surely every man can do: for to use our sincere endeavours, is nothing else, but to do as much as we can; and it is nonsense for any man to deny that he can do as much as he can. And if we would do thus much, we are sure of God's grace and assistance; which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. But men expect that religion should cost them no pains; that happiness should drop into their laps,



laps, without any design and endeavour on their part; and that, after they have done what they please while they live, God should snatch them up to heaven when they die. But though *the commandments of God be not grievous*, yet it is fit to let men know that they are not thus easy.

4. All the difficulties of religion are very much allayed and sweetened by hope and by love. By the hopes of a mighty reward; so great as is enough to raise us above ourselves, and to make us break through all difficulties and discouragements. And by the love of God, who hath taken all imaginable ways to endear himself to us. He gave us our beings; and when we were fallen from that happiness to which at first we were designed, he was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of it, by sending his only Son into the world to die for us. So that if we have any sense of kindness, we cannot but love him who hath done so much to oblige us; and if we love him entirely, nothing that he commands will be grievous to us: nay, so far from that, that the greatest pleasure we are capable of, will be to please him. For nothing is difficult to love. It will make a man deny himself, and cross his own inclinations, to pleasure them whom he loves. It is a passion of a strange power where it reigns, and will cause a man to submit to those things with delight, which in other circumstances would seem grievous to him: Jacob served for Rachel *seven years*, and after that *seven years more*; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. Did but the love of God rule in our hearts, and had we as real an affection for him as some men have for their friends, there are no such difficulties in religion but what love would conquer; and the severest parts of it would become easy, when they were once undertaken by a willing mind.

5. There is incomparably more trouble in the ways of sin and vice, than in those of religion and virtue. Every notorious sin is naturally attended with some inconvenience of harm, or danger, or disgrace; which the sinner seldom considers, till the sin be committed, and then he is in a labyrinth; and, in seeking the way out of a present inconvenience, he intangles himself in more. He is glad to make use of indirect arts, and laborious crafts,

crafts, to avoid the consequences of his faults; and many times is fain to cover one sin with another; and the more he strives to disintangle himself, the more is he snared in the work of his own hands. Into what perplexities did David's sin bring him? such as by all his power and arts he could not free himself from. He was glad to commit a greater crime, to avoid the shame of a less; and could find no other way to conceal his adultery, but by plunging himself into the guilt of murder. And thus it is proportionably in all other vices. The ways of sin are crooked paths, full of windings and turnings: but the way of holiness and virtue is a high-way, and lies so plain before us, that wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein, II. xxxv. 8. There needs no skill to keep a man's self true and honest, if we will but resolve to deal justly, and to speak the truth to our neighbour: nothing in the whole world is easier; for there is nothing of artifice and reach required, to enable a man to speak as he thinks, and to do to others as he would be dealt withal himself.

And as the ways of sin are full of intricacy and perplexities, so likeways of trouble and disquiet. There is no man that wilfully commits any sin, but his conscience smites him for it, and his guilty mind is frequently galled with the remembrance of it; but the reflection upon honest and virtuous actions, hath nothing of regret and disquiet in it. No man's conscience ever troubled him for not being dishonest; no man's reason ever challenged him for not being drunk; no man ever broke his sleep, or was haunted with fears of divine vengeance, because he was conscious to himself, that he had lived soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world. But with the ungodly it is not so. There is no man that is knowingly wicked, but he is guilty to himself; and there is no man that carries guilt about him, but he hath received a sting into his soul, which makes him restless, so that he can never have any perfect ease and pleasure in his mind.

I might have descended to particular instances, and have shewn, how much more troublesome the practice of every sin and vice is, than the exercise of the contrary

grace and virtue. But that would be too large a subject to be brought within the limits of a single discourse.

6. Let but virtue and vice, a religious and wicked course of life, be put in equal circumstances; do but suppose a man to be as much accustomed and inured to the one as he has been to the other: and then I doubt not but the advantages of ease and pleasure will be found to be on the side of religion. And if we do not put the case thus, we make an unequal comparison: for there is no man, but, when he first begins a wicked course, feels a great deal of regret in his mind; the terrors of his conscience, and the fears of damnation, are very troublesome to him. It is possible that by degrees a man may harden his conscience, and, by a long custom of sinning, may in a great measure wear off that tender sense of good and evil which makes sin so uneasy: but then, if in the practice of a holy life a man may, by the same degrees, arrive to far greater peace and tranquillity of mind, than ever any wicked men found in a sinful course; if by custom virtue will come to be more pleasant than ever vice was, then the advantage is plainly on the side of religion. And this is truly the case. It is troublesome at first for a man to begin any new course, and to do contrary to what he hath been accustomed to: but let a man but habituate himself to a religious and virtuous life, and the trouble will go off by degrees, and unspeakable pleasure succeed in the room of it. It is an excellent rule which Pythagoras gave to his scholars, *Optimum vitæ genus eligito; nam consuetudo faciet jucundissimum*: “Pitch upon the best course of life, (resolve always to do that which is most reasonable and virtuous), and custom will soon render it the most easy.” There is nothing of difficulty in a good life, but what may be conquered by custom, as well as the difficulties of any other course; and when a man is once used to it, the pleasure of it will be greater than of any other course.

Let no man then decline or forsake religion for the pretended difficulties of it, and lay aside all care of God's commandments, upon this suggestion, that they are impossible to be kept; for you see they are not only possible, but easy. And those who, upon pretence of  
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the trouble and difficulties of religion, abandon themselves to a wicked course of life, may easily be convinced, that they take more pains to make themselves miserable, than would serve to bring them to happiness. There is no man that is a servant to sin, and a slave to any base lust, but might, if he pleased, get to heaven with less trouble than he goes to hell.

So that, upon consideration of the whole matter, there is no reason why any man should be deterred from a holy and virtuous life, for fear of the labour and pains of it; because every one that is wicked, takes more pains in another way, and is more industrious only to a worse purpose. Now, he that can travel in deep and foul ways, ought not to say that he cannot walk in fair. He that ventures to run upon a precipice, when every step he takes is with danger of his life and his soul, ought not to pretend any thing against the plain and safe paths of religion; which will entertain us with pleasure all along in the way, and crown us with happiness at the end.

## S E R M O N VII.

Of the obligation of Christians to a holy life.

2 T I M. ii. 19.

*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

**T**HE whole verse runs thus: *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

In which words the Apostle declares to us the terms of the covenant between God and man. For the word θεμελιος, which is here translated *foundation*, according to the usual signification of it, is likewise, as learned men have observed, sometimes used for an instrument of contract, whereby two parties do oblige themselves mutually.

to each other. And this notion of the word agrees very well with what follows concerning the seal affixed to it ; which is very suitable to a covenant, but not at all to a foundation. It is true indeed, as the learned Grotius hath observed, there used anciently to be inscriptions on foundation stones ; and the word σφραγίς, which we render *seal*, may likeways signify an *inscription* : and then the sense will be very current, thus : *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this inscription.* But it is to be considered, that though σφραγίς may signify an inscription, yet it is only an inscription upon a seal ; which hath no relation to a foundation, but is very proper to a covenant or mutual obligation. And accordingly the seal affixed to this instrument, or covenant between God and man, is, in allusion to the custom of those countries, said to have an inscription on both sides, agreeable to the condition of the persons contracting. On God's part there is this impress or inscription, *The Lord knoweth them that are his* ; that is, God will own and reward those that are faithful to him : and on our part, *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ* ; that is, that calls himself a Christian. For to name the name of any one, or to have his name called upon by us, does, according to the use of this phrase among the Hebrews, signify nothing else, but to be denominated from him. Thus it is frequently used in the Old Testament ; and sometimes in the New : *Do they not blaspheme that worthy name, by the which they are called ?* Jam. ii. 7. that is, the name or title of Christians. And that expression, *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ*, 1. Pet. iv. 14. is at the 16th verse varied, *If any man suffer as a Christian.* So that to name the name of Christ is to call ourselves Christians.

*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.* The word ἀδικία is often taken strictly, for injustice or unrighteousness ; but sometimes used more largely, for sin and wickedness in the general. And so it seems to be used here in the text ; because there is no reason from the context to restrain it to any particular kind of sin or vice, and because Christianity lays an equal obligation upon men to abstain from all sin. *Let every*  
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one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity; that is, every Christian obligeth himself, by his profession, to renounce all sin, and to live a holy life. In speaking to this argument I shall do these two things.

1. Shew what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives.

2. Endeavour to persuade those who call themselves Christians to answer this obligation.

1. What obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives. He that calls himself a Christian, professeth to entertain the doctrine of Christ, to live in the imitation of his holy example, and to have solemnly engaged himself to all this. I shall speak briefly to these; and then come to that which I principally intend, to persuade men to live accordingly.

1. He that professeth himself a Christian, professeth to entertain the doctrine of Christ, to believe the whole gospel; to assent to all the articles of the Christian faith, to all the precepts, and promises, and threatnings of the gospel. Now, the great design, the proper intention of this doctrine, is, to take men off from sin, and to direct and encourage them to a holy life. It teacheth us what we are to believe concerning God and Christ; not with any design to entertain our minds with the bare speculation of those truths, but to better our lives. For every article of our faith is a proper argument against sin, and a powerful motive to obedience. The whole history of Christ's appearance in the world, all the discourses and actions of his life, and the sufferings of his death, do all tend to this. The ultimate issue of all is, the destroying of sin. So St. John tells us: *For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil*, 1 John, iii. 8. But this is most expressly and fully declared to us, Tit. ii. 11. 12. 13. 14. *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*



The precepts of the gospel do strictly command holiness, and that universal; the purity of our souls, and the chastity of our bodies; *to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, 2 Cor. vii. 1. to abstain from all kind of evil. 1. Theff. v. 22. to be holy in all manner of conversation, 1. Pet. i. 15.* They require us to endeavour after the highest degrees of holiness that are attainable by us in this imperfect state; *to be holy, as he that hath called us is holy; to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect, Matth. v. 48.*

And all the promises of the gospel are so many encouragements to obedience and a holy life: *Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2. Cor. vii. 1.* We are told by St. Peter, that these exceeding great and precious promises are given to us, that by these *we might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust: and that we might give all diligence to add to our faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity, 2 Pet. i. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.*

And the threatnings of the gospel are so many powerful arguments against sin.

Therefore the Apostle calls the gospel *the power of God unto salvation; because therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, Rom. i. 16. 18.* So that if we call ourselves Christians, we profess to embrace the holy doctrine of the Christian religion; which is perfectly opposite to all impiety, and wickedness of life. We profess to be governed by those laws which do strictly injoin holiness and virtue. We profess to be persuaded, that all the promises and threatnings of the gospel are true, which offer such great and glorious rewards to obedience, and threaten transgression and disobedience with such dreadful punishments. And if so, we are obliged both by our reason and our interest to live accordingly.

2. He that professeth himself a Christian, professeth to live in the imitation of Christ's example, and to follow his steps; *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* The son of God came into the world, not only  
by



by his doctrine to instruct us in the way to happiness, and by his death to make expiation of sin; but by his life to be an example to us, of holiness and virtue. Therefore in scripture we find several titles given him, which import his exemplariness, as of a *Prince* and a *Captain*, a *Master* and a *Guide*. Now, if he be our pattern, we should endeavour to be like him; *to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus; to walk in love, as he also hath loved us, and given himself for us*. We should aspire after the highest degree of holiness; and make it our constant and sincere endeavour to please God, and do his will, and *to fulfil all righteousness*, as he did. Does any man profess himself a Christian, and yet abandons himself to intemperance and filthy lusts? is this like our Saviour? Are we cruel and unmerciful? is this like the High Priest of our profession? Are we proud and passionate, malicious and revengeful? is this to be like-minded with Christ, who was meek and lowly in spirit, who prayed for his enemies, and offered up his blood to God on the behalf of them that shed it? If we call ourselves Christians, we profess to have the life of Christ continually before us, and to be always correcting and reforming our lives by that pattern.

3. He that calls himself a Christian, hath solemnly engaged himself to renounce all sin, and to live a holy life. By baptism we have solemnly taken upon us the profession of Christianity, and engaged ourselves to renounce the devil and all his works, and obediently to keep God's commandments. Anciently those who were baptized, put off their garments, which signified the putting off the body of sin; and were immersed and buried in the water, to represent their death to sin; and then did rise up again out of the water, to signify their entrance upon a new life. And to these customs the Apostle alludes when he says, *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ, were baptized unto his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified*

with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, Rom. vi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. So that by baptism we profess to be entered into a new state, and to be endued with a new nature; to have put off the old man with his deeds: to have quitted our former conversation, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And therefore baptism is called the putting on of Christ: As many of you as have been baptized unto Christ, have put on Christ, Gal. iii. 27. Now, if we profess to have put on Christ, we must quit and renounce our lusts; because these are inconsistent; as appears by the opposition which the Apostle makes between them: Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. xiii. 14.

And as we did solemnly covenant with God, to this purpose, in baptism, so we do solemnly renew this obligation so often as we receive the blessed sacrament of Christ's body and blood. Therefore the cup in the sacrament is called the new covenant in his blood; that is, this represents the shedding of Christ's blood; by which rite the covenant between God and man is ratified. And as by this God doth confirm his promises to us, so we do oblige ourselves to be faithful and obedient to him: And if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, that is, after we are become Christians, we account the blood of the covenant a common thing; that is, we make nothing of the solemnest rite that ever was used in the world for confirmation of any covenant, the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. And that this was always understood to be the meaning of this holy sacrament, to renew our covenant with God, and solemnly to confirm our resolutions of a holy life, is very plain from that account which Pliny gives us of the worship of the Christians, in a letter to Trajan the emperor; in which he tells him, "That they assembled early in the morning before day, to sing a hymn to Christ as God, And then (saith he) they do (*sacramento se obstringere*) bind themselves by a sacrament or oath, not to rob or steal, or commit adultery; not to break their  
" word,

“ word, or falsify their trust ; and after they have eaten together, they depart home,” *Plin. lib. 10. ep. 97.* Which is plainly an account of the Christians celebrating of the holy sacrament, which it seems was then looked upon as an oath, whereby Christians did solemnly covenant and engage themselves against all wickedness and vice.

Thus you see what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon us, to holiness of life. From all which it is evident, that the gospel requires something on our part. For the covenant between God and us is a mutual engagement ; and as there are blessings promised on his part, so there are conditions to be performed on ours. And if we live wicked and unholy lives, if we neglect our duty towards God, we have no title at all to the blessings of this covenant. The contrary doctrine to this hath been greedily entertained, to the vast prejudice of Christianity, as if in this new covenant of the gospel God took all upon himself, and required nothing, or as good as nothing, of us ; that it would be a disparagement to the freedom of God’s grace, to think he expects any thing from us ; that the gospel is all promises, and our part is only to believe and embrace them ; that is, to be confident that God will perform them, if we can but think so, tho’ we do nothing else : which is an easy condition to fools, but the hardest in the world to a wise man ; who, if his salvation depended upon it, could never persuade himself to believe, that the holy God, without any respect at all to his repentance and amendment, would bestow upon him forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, only because he was confident that God would do so ; as if any man could think that it were a thing so highly acceptable to God, that men should believe of him, that he loves to dispense his grace and mercy upon the most unfit and unreasonable terms. A covenant does necessarily imply a mutual obligation ; and the scripture plainly tells us what are the terms and conditions of this covenant, both on God’s part and ours, namely, that he *will be our God*, and we *shall be his people*. But he hath no where said, that tho’ we be not his people, yet he will be our God. The seal of this covenant hath two inscriptions upon it ; one on God’s part, that he *will know them that are his* ; and

another on our part, that we shall *depart from iniquity*. But if we will not submit to this condition, God will not know us; but will bid us depart from him. So our Saviour tells us: *I will say unto them, Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity: I know you not*, Matth. vii. 23. If we deal falsely in covenant with God, and break loose from all our engagements to him, we release God from all the promises that he hath made to us. If we neglect to perform those conditions upon which he hath suspended the performance of his promises, we discharge the obligation on God's part; and he remains faithful, tho' he deny us that happiness which he promised under those conditions which we have neglected.

II. I come now to the second thing propounded; and that is, to persuade those who profess Christianity, to answer those obligations to a holy life, which their religion lays upon them. We all call ourselves Christians, and would be very much offended at any man that should deny us this title. But let us not cheat ourselves with an empty and insignificant name; but, if we will call ourselves Christians, let us fill up this great title, and make good our profession, by a suitable life and practice. And to persuade us hereto, I will urge these three considerations.

1. The indecency of the contrary.

2. The great scandal of it to our blessed Saviour, and his holy religion. And,

3. The infinite danger of it to our own souls.

1. Consider how unbecoming it is for a man to live unsuitably to his profession. If we call ourselves Christians, we profess to entertain the doctrine of the gospel; to be taught and instructed by the best master; to be the disciples of the highest and most perfect institution that ever was in the world; to have embraced a religion which contains the most exact rules for the conduct and government of our lives, which lays down the plainest precepts, sets before us the best patterns and examples of a holy life, and offers us the greatest assistances and encouragements to this purpose. We profess to be furnished with the best arguments to excite us to holiness and virtue; to be awed with the greatest fears, and animated with the best hopes of any men in the world.

Now, whoever makes such a profession as this, obligeth

eth himself to live answerably, to do nothing that shall grossly contradict it. Nothing is more absurd, than for a man to act contrary to his profession; to pretend to great matters, and perform nothing of what he pretends to. Wise men will not be caught with pretences, nor be imposed upon with an empty profession; but they will inquire into our lives and actions, and by these they will make a judgment of us. They cannot see into our hearts, nor pry into our understandings, to discover what it is that we inwardly believe; they cannot discern those secret and supernatural principles that we pretend to be acted by: but this they can do, they can examine our actions, and behold our good and bad works; and try whether our lives be indeed answerable to our profession, and do really excel the lives of other men who do not pretend to such great things. There are a great many sagacious persons who will easily find us out; will look under our mask, and see through all our fine pretensions, and will quickly discern the absurdity of telling the world that we believe one thing, when we do the contrary.

If we profess to believe the Christian religion, we expose ourselves to the scorn and contempt of every discerning man, if we do not live up to it. With what face can any man continue in the practice of any known sin, that professeth to believe the holy doctrine of the gospel, which forbids all sin, under the highest and severest penalties? If we did but believe the history of the gospel, as we do any ordinary credible history, and did we but regard the laws of Christianity as we do the laws of the land; were we but persuaded, that fraud and oppression, lying and perjury, intemperance and uncleanness, covetousness and pride, malice and revenge, the neglect of God and religion, will bring men to hell, as certainly as treason and felony will bring a man under the sentence of the law; had we but the same awe and regard for the threatenings and promises of the gospel, that we have for the frowns and smiles of those who are in power and authority: even this would be effectual to keep us from sin. And if the gospel have not this effect upon us, it is an argument that we do not believe it.

It is to no purpose to go about to persuade men, that we do heartily entertain the doctrine of Christ; that doc-

trine which hath all the characters of piety and justice, of holiness and virtue, upon it; which obligeth men to *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are chaste, whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report*, if we have no regard to these things in our lives. He that would know what a man believes, let him attend rather to what he does than to what he talks. He that leads a wicked life, makes a more credible and effectual profession of infidelity, than he who in words only denies the gospel. It is the hardest thing in the world to imagine, that that man believes Christianity, who, by ungodliness and worldly lusts, does deny and renounce it. If we profess ourselves Christians, it may justly be expected from us, that we should evidence this by our actions; that we should live at another rate than the Heathens did; that we who worship a holy and just God, should not allow ourselves the liberty to sin, as those did who worshipped such gods as were examples of sin, and patrons of their vices. Thou who professest thyself a Christian, mayest not walk in the lusts of the flesh, and of uncleanness, as those did who worshipped a lustful Jupiter, and a wanton Venus; thou mayest not be intemperate, as those were who worshipped a drunken Bacchus; thou mayest not be cruel and unmerciful, as those were who worshipped a fierce Saturn; nor mayest thou steal, as those did who worshipped a thievish Mercury. Thou must remember that thou art a Christian; and when thou art ready to debase thyself to any vile lust, consider what title thou bearest, by what name thou art called, whose disciple thou art; and then say to thyself, Shall I allow myself in any impiety, or wickedness of life, who pretend to be instructed by that grace of God, which teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts? Shall I cherish any sinful passion, who pretend to have mortified all these, and to have *put off the old man with his deeds*?

It is not being gilded over with the external profession of Christianity that will avail us; our religion must be a vital principle, inwardly to change and transform us. What the Apostle says concerning circumcision, Rom. ii. 25. we may apply to them that are baptized, and make an outward profession of Christianity: *Baptism ve-*  
rily

rily profiteth, if we obey the gospel; but if we walk contrary to the precepts of it, our baptism is no baptism, and our Christianity is Heathenism. If by our lives and actions we do contradict that religion which we profess, we do by this very thing prove ourselves to be counterfeits and hypocrites; and that we have only taken up our religion for a fashion, and received it according to custom; we were born in a country where it is revered, and therefore we are of it. And the reason why we are Christians, rather than Jews, or Turks, or Heathens, is, because the Christian religion had the fortune to come first in our way, and to bespeak us at our entrance into the world.

Are we not ashamed to take up a profession upon such slight grounds, and to wear about us such an empty title? It should make our blood to rise in our faces, to consider what a distance there is between our religion and our lives. I remember Tully upbraids the philosophers very smartly for living unsuitably to their doctrines. A philosopher (saith he) is unpardonable if he miscarry in his life; *quod in officio cujus magister esse vult, labitur; artemque vitæ professus, delinquit in vita*: "Because he is faulty in that wherein he pretends to be a master; and whilst he professeth an art of living better than other men, he miscarries in his life." With how much greater reason may we challenge Christians for the miscarriages of their lives, which are so directly contrary to their profession? It may be justly expected, that so perfect an institution as the gospel is, which the Son of God came from heaven on purpose to propagate in the world, should make men more strictly holy and virtuous, and set the professors of it at a greater distance from all impurity and vice, than ever any institution in the world did. If a man profess any other art or calling, it is expected that he should be skilled in it, and excel those who do not pretend to it. It is the greatest disparagement to a physician that can be, to say of him, That he is in other respects an excellent man, only he hath no great skill in diseases, and the methods of cure; because this is his profession. He might be pardoned for other defects; but the proper skill of his art may justly be expected from him. So for a Christian, to say of him, The worst thing



should abandon their profession, than keep on a vizard, which serves to no other purpose, but to scare others from religion.

3. and lastly, Let us consider the danger we expose ourselves to, by not living answerably to our religion. And this, I hope, may prevail upon such as are not moved by the former considerations. Hypocrites are instanced in scripture, as a sort of sinners that shall have the sharpest torments, and the fiercest damnation. When our Saviour would set forth the great severity of the Lord towards the evil servant, he expresseth it thus: *He shall cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites*, Matth. xxiv. 51. So that the punishment of hypocrites seems to be made the measure and standard of the highest punishment. Thou professest to believe in Christ, and to hope in him for salvation; but in the mean time thou livest a wicked and unholy life: thou dost not believe, but presume on him; and wilt find, at the great day, that this thy confidence will be thy confusion, and he whom thou hopest will be thy Advocate and Saviour, will prove thy accuser, and thy judge. What our Saviour says to the Jews, *There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust*, John v. 45. may very well be applied to false Christians, *There is one that accuseth you, and will condemn you, even Jesus, in whom ye trust*.

The profession of Christianity, and mens having the name of Christ named upon them, will be so far from securing them from hell, that it will sink them the deeper into it. Many are apt to pity the poor Heathens, who never heard of the name of Christ, and sadly to condole their case: but, as our Saviour said upon another occasion, *Weep not for them; weep for yourselves*. There is no such miserable person in the world as a degenerate Christian; because he falls into the greatest misery, from the greatest advantages and opportunities of being happy. Dost thou lament the condition of Socrates, and Cato, and Aristides, and doubt what shall become of them at the day of judgment? and canst thou who art an impious and profane Christian, think that thou shalt escape the damnation of hell?

Dost thou believe that the moral Heathen shall be cast out?

out? and canst thou who hast led a wicked life under the profession of Christianity, have the impudence to hope, that thou shalt sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God? No: Those sins which are committed by Christians under the enjoyment of the gospel, are of deeper dye, and clothed with blacker aggravations, than the sins of Heathens are capable of. A Pagan may live without God in the world, and be unjust towards men, at a cheaper rate, and upon easier terms, than thou who art a Christian. Better had it been thou hadst never known one syllable of the gospel, never heard of the name of Christ, than that, having taken it upon thee, thou shouldst not *depart from iniquity*. Happy had it been for thee that thou hadst been born a Jew, or a Turk, or a poor Indian, rather than that, being bred among Christians, and professing thyself of that number, thou shouldst lead a vitious and unholy life.

I have insisted the longer upon these arguments, that I might, if possible, awaken men to a serious consideration of their lives, and persuade them to a real reformation of them; that I may oblige all those who call themselves Christians, to live up to the essential and fundamental laws of our religion; to love God, and to love our neighbour; to do to every man as we would have him to do to us; to mortify our lusts, and subdue our passions, and sincerely to endeavour to grow in every grace and virtue; and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

This indeed would become our profession, and be honourable to our religion, and would remove one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the gospel. For how can we expect that the doctrine of God our Saviour should gain any considerable ground in the world, so long as, by the unworthy lives of so many Christians, it is represented to the world at so great disadvantage? If ever we would have the Christian religion effectually recommended, it must be by the holy and unblameable lives of those who make profession of it. Then indeed it would look with so amiable a countenance, as to invite many to it; and carry so much majesty and authority in it, as to command reverence from its greatest enemies,  
and

and make men to acknowledge that God is in us of a truth, and to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

The good God grant, that as we have taken upon us the profession of Christianity, so we may be careful so to live, that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, may teach us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.

## S E R M O N VIII.

Of the happiness of a heavenly conversation.

P H I L. iii. 20.

*For our conversation is in heaven.*

**F**OR the understanding of which words we need to look back no farther than the 18th verse of this chapter, where the Apostle with great vehemency and passion speaks of some among the Philippians, who indeed professed Christianity, but yet would do any thing to decline suffering for that profession: *There are many that walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ; they cannot endure to suffer with him and for him; they are so sensual, and wedded to this world, that they will do any thing to avoid persecution.* So he describes them in the next verse: *Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things.* Now, in opposition to these sensual and earthly-minded men, the Apostle gives us the character of the true Christians: They are such as mind heaven and another

ther world, and prefer the hopes of that to all the interests of this life: *Our conversation is in heaven.*

For the right understanding of which phrase, be pleased to observe, that it is an allusion to a city or corporation, and to the privileges and manners of those who are free of it. And heaven is several times in scripture represented to us under this notion of a city. It is said of Abraham, that *he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*, Heb. xi. 10. It is called likewise *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*, Heb. xii. 22. And the same Apostle, speaking of the uncertain condition of Christians in this world, says of them, that *here they have no continuing city, but look for one that is to come*, Heb. xii. 14.

Now to this city the Apostle alludes here in the text, when he says, *Our conversation is in heaven*: for the word *πολίτευμα*, which is rendered *conversation*, may either signify the *privilege* of citizens, or their *conversation* and manners; or may take in both these.

In the first sense, of the privilege of citizens, we find *πολιτεία*, a word of near affinity with this, sometimes used: *With a great sum* (says the Captain to Paul) *obtained I τὴν πολιτείαν ταύτην, this freedom*, Acts xxii.

8. According to this sense, *ἡμῶν τὸ πολίτευμα* may very well be rendered, as Tertullian often does this text, *municipatus noster, our citizenship is in heaven*; an allusion perhaps, as the learned Dr. Hammond observes, to those, who though they were not born at Rome, and it may be lived at a great distance from it, had yet *jus civitatis Romanae*, the privilege of Roman citizens. In like manner the Apostle here describes the condition of Christians. It is true, we are born here in this world, and live in it: but we belong to another corporation; we are citizens of another country, and free of that city which is above.

In the other sense, of the conversation of citizens, we find the verb *πολιτευεσθε* used towards the beginning of this epistle: *Let your conversation be as it becometh the *spell* of Christ*, Phil. i. 27. And why may not the word *πολίτευμα* in the text, without any inconvenience, include both these? as if the Apostle had said, There are some that mind earthly things, and are so addicted to

them, that; rather than part with them, they will forsake their religion: but, as for us, we consider, that we are citizens of heaven; and accordingly we converse and demean ourselves in this world, as those that are free of another city, and do belong to it.

So that *to have our conversation in heaven* does imply these two things.

1. The serious thoughts and considerations of heaven
2. The effect which those thoughts ought to have upon our lives.

These two things take up the meaning of my text, and shall be the subject of the following discourse.

*First*, The serious thoughts and considerations of heaven; that is, of the happy and glorious state of good men in another life. And, concerning this, there are two things principally which offer themselves to our consideration: 1. The happiness of this state. 2. The way and means whereby we may come to partake of this happiness.

I. We will consider the happiness of this state. But what, and how great this happiness is, I am not able to represent to you. These things are yet in a great measure within the veil, and it does not now fully appear *what we shall be*. The scriptures have revealed so much in general concerning the reality and unspeakable felicities of this state, as may satisfy us for the present, and serve to inflame our desires after it, and to quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it: as, namely, that it is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world; that it is very great; and that it is eternal; in a word, that it is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine.

1. It is incomparably beyond any happiness in this world. It is free from all those sharp and bitter ingredients which do abate and allay the felicities of this life. All the enjoyments of this world are mixed, and uncertain, and unsatisfying: nay, so far are they from giving us satisfaction, that the very sweetest of them are satiating and cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are pure and unmixed. There is something of vanity mingled with all our earthly enjoyments, and that causeth vexation of spirit.

*rit.* There is no sensual pleasure, but is either purchased by some pain, or attended with it, or ends in it. A great estate is neither to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor lost without trouble. Dignity and greatness is troublesome almost to all mankind; it is commonly uneasy to them that have it, and it is usually hated and envied by those that have it not. Knowledge, that is one of the best and sweetest pleasures of human life; and yet, if we may believe the experience of one who had as great a share of it as any of the sons of men ever had, he will tell us, that *this also is vexation of spirit; for in much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow,* Eccl. i. 17, 18.

Thus it is with all the things of this world. The best of them have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and sorrow in them. But the happiness of the next life is free from alloy and mixture. In the description of the new Jerusalem, it is said, that *there shall be no more curse, and there shall be no night there,* Rev. xxii. 3, 5. nothing to embitter our blessings, or obscure our glory. Heaven is the proper region of happiness; there only are pure joys and an unmingled felicity.

But the enjoyments of this world, as they are mixed, so they are uncertain. So wavering and inconstant are they, that we can have no security of them: when we think ourselves to have the fastest hold of them, they slip out of our hands we know not how. For this reason Solomon very elegantly calls them things *that are not: Why wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings, and fly like an eagle towards heaven.* So fugitive are they, that, after all our endeavours to secure them, they may break loose from us, and in an instant vanish out of our sight. *Riches make to themselves wings, and fly like an eagle;* intimating to us, that riches are often accessory to their own ruin. Many times the greatness of a man's estate, and nothing else, hath been the cause of the loss of it, and of taking away the life of the owner thereof. The fairness of some mens fortune hath been a temptation to those who have been more powerful, to ravish it from them. Thus *riches make to themselves wings.* So that

he that enjoys the greatest happiness of this world, does still want one happiness more, to secure to him for the future what he possesses for the present. But the happiness of heaven is a steady and constant light, fixed and unchangeable as the fountain from whence it springs, *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.*

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unsatisfying. This is the *vanity of vanities*, that every thing in this world can trouble us, but nothing can give us satisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are so phantastical, that we can neither be well with these things, nor well without them. If we be hungry, we are in pain; and if we eat to the full, we are uneasy. If we be poor, we think ourselves miserable; and when we come to be rich, we commonly really are so. If we are in a low condition, we fret and murmur; and if we chance to get up, and to be raised to greatness, we are many times farther from contentment than we were before. So that we pursue the happiness of this world just as little children chase birds: when we think we are come very near it, and have it almost in our hands, it flies farther from us than it was at first.

Nay, so far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us satisfaction, that the sweetest of them are most apt to satiate and cloy us. All the pleasures of this world are so contrived, as to yield us very little happiness. If they go off quickly, they signify nothing; and if they stay long, we are sick of them. After a full draught of any sensual pleasure, we presently lothe it, and hate it as much after the enjoyment, as we courted it and longed for it in the expectation. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full satisfaction, so we shall never be weary of them. Every repetition of them will be accompanied with a new pleasure and contentment. In the felicities of heaven, these two things shall be reconciled, which never met together in any sensual delight; long and full enjoyment, and yet a fresh and perpetual pleasure. As in God's presence there is fulness of joy, so at his right hand there shall be pleasures for evermore.



2. The happiness of the other life is not only incomparably beyond any happiness of this world, (that, it may be, is no great commendation of it), but it is very great in itself. The happiness of heaven is usually in scripture described to us by such pleasures as are manly and excellent, chaste and intellectual; infinitely more pure and refined than those of sense: and if the scripture at any time descend to the metaphors of a feast, and a banquet, and a marriage; it is plainly by way of accommodation to our weakness, and condescension to our capacities.

But the chief ingredients of this happiness, so far as the scripture hath thought fit to reveal it to us, are, the perfection of our knowledge, and the height of our love, and the perpetual society and friendship of all the blessed inhabitants of those glorious mansions; and the joyful concurrence of all these in cheerful expressions of gratitude, in the incessant praises and admiration of the fountain and author of all this happiness. And what can be more delightful, than to have our understandings entertained with a clear sight of the best and most perfect being, with the knowledge of all his works, and of the wise designs of his providence here in the world? than to live in the reviving presence of God, and to be continually attending upon him whose favour is life, and whose glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greatest of them is above the poorest worm? The Queen of Sheba thought Solomon's servants happy in having the opportunity, by standing continually before him, to hear his wisdom; but, in the other world, it shall be a happiness to Solomon himself, and to the wisest and greatest persons that ever were in this world, to stand before this great King, to admire his wisdom, and to behold his glory. Not that I imagine the happiness of heaven to consist in a perpetual gazing upon God, and in an idle contemplation of the glories of that place: for as by that blessed sight we shall be infinitely transported, so the scripture tells us we shall be also transformed into the image of the divine perfections: *We shall see God, and we shall be like him.* And what greater happiness can there be, than to be like the happiest and most perfect being in the world? Besides,

who can tell what employment God may have for us the next life? We need not doubt, but that he who happiness itself, and hath promised to make us happy can easily find out such employments and delights for in the other world, as will be proper and suitable to the state.

But then, besides the improvement of our knowledge there shall be the most delightful exercise of love. When we come to heaven, we shall enter into the society of the blessed angels, and of *the spirits of just men made perfect*; that is, freed from all those passions and infirmities which do now render the conversation, even of the best men, sometimes troublesome to one another. We shall then meet with all those excellent persons, those bright minds, those innocent and charitable souls, whom we have seen, and heard, and read of in this world. There we shall meet with many of our dear relations and intimate friends, and perhaps with many of our enemies; whom we shall then be perfectly reconciled, notwithstanding all the warm contests and peevish differences which we had with them in this world, even about matters of religion. For heaven is a state of perfect love and friendship; there will be nothing but kindness and good-nature there, and all the prudent arts of endeavourment, and wise ways of rendering conversation mutually pleasant to one another. And what greater happiness can be imagined, than to converse freely with so many excellent persons, without any thing of folly or disguise, of jealousy or design upon one another? For then there will be none of those vices and passions, of covetousness and ambition, of envy and hatred, of wrath and peevishness, which do now so much spoil the pleasure and disturb the quiet of mankind. All quarrels and contentions, schisms and divisions, will then be effectually hindered; not by force, but by love; not by compulsion, but by that *charity which never fails*: and all those controversies in religion, which are not so hotly agitated will then be finally determined; not as we endeavour to end them now, by canons and decrees, but by a perfect knowledge, and convincing light.

And when this blessed society is met together, and thus united by love, they shall all join in gratitude to the

their great patrons and benefactors : *To him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain : to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* And they shall sing everlasting songs of praise to God, for all his works of wonder, for the effects of that infinite goodnes, and admirable wisdom, and almighty power, which are clearly seen in the creation and government of the world, and of all the creatures in it : particularly for his favours to mankind ; for the benefit of their beings, for the comfort of their lives, and for all his merciful providences towards them in this world ; but above all, for the redemption of their souls by the death of his Son, for the free forgiveness of their sins, for the gracious assistance of his Holy Spirit, and for conducting them safely through all the snares and dangers, the troubles and temptations of this world, to the secure possession of that glory and happiness which then they shall be partakers of, and are bound to praise God for to all eternity. This, this shall be the employment of the blessed spirits above ; and these are the chief ingredients of our happiness which the scripture mentions. And if there were no other, as there may be ten thousand more for any thing I can tell ; yet generous and virtuous minds will easily understand, how great a pleasure there is in the improvement of our knowledge, and the exercise of love, and in a grateful and perpetual acknowledgment of the greatest benefits that creatures are capable of receiving.

3. This happiness shall be eternal. And though this be but a circumstance, and do not enter into the nature of our happiness ; yet it is so material a one, that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. It would strangely damp and allay all our joys, to think that they should sometime have an end. And the greater our happiness were, the greater trouble it would be to us to consider that it must have a period. It would make a man sorrowful indeed, to think of leaving such vast possessions. Indeed, if the happiness of heaven were such as the joys of this world are, it were fit they should be as short ; for after a little enjoyment, it would cloy us, and we should soon grow weary of it. But being so excellent, it would scarce be a happiness if it were not

not eternal. It would imbitter the pleasures of heaven, as great as they are, to see to an end of them, though it were at never so great a distance; to consider that all his vast treasure of happiness would one day be exhausted, and that after so many years were past, we should be as poor and miserable again as we were once in this world. God hath so ordered things, that the vain and empty delights of this world should be temporary and transient; but that the great and substantial pleasures of the other world should be as lasting as they are excellent. For heaven, as it is an *exceeding*, so it is an *eternal weight of glory*. And this is that which crowns the joys of heaven, and banishes all fear and trouble from the minds of the blessed. And thus to be secured in the possession of our happiness, is an unspeakable addition to it. For that which is eternal, as it shall never determine, so it can never be diminished: for to be diminished, and to decay, is to draw nearer to an end; but that which shall never have an end, can never come nearer to it.

O vast eternity! how dost thou swallow up our thoughts, and entertain us at once with delight and amazement? This is the very top and highest pitch of our happiness, upon which we may stand secure, and look down with scorn upon all things here below: and how small and inconsiderable do they appear to us, compared with the vast and endless enjoyments of our future state? But oh! vain and foolish souls, that are so little concerned for eternity, that for the trifles of time, and the *pleasures of sin, which are but for a season*, can find in our hearts to forfeit an everlasting felicity! Blessed God! why hast thou prepared such a happiness for those who neither consider it, nor seek after it? *Why is such a price put into the hands of fools, who have no heart to make use of it?* who fondly chuse to gratify their lusts, rather than to save their souls; and sottishly prefer the temporary enjoyments of sin, before a blessed immortality?

4. And lastly, This happiness is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. It is so great, that it cannot now *enter into the heart of man*. We cannot, from the experience of any of these pleasures and delights which we have been acquainted withal in this world,

world, frame an equal idea and conception of it. So that, when we come to heaven, we shall be ready to say of it as the queen of Sheba did of Solomon's wisdom and prosperity, that *half of it had not been told us*; that the felicities and glories of that state do far exceed all the same which we heard of them in this world: for who can say how great a good God is? and how happy he, who is the fountain of happiness, can make those souls that love him, and those whom he loves?

In this imperfect state we are not capable of a full representation of those glories: *We cannot now see God and live.* A full description of heaven, and of the pleasures of that state, would let in joys upon us too big for our narrow capacities, and too strong for weak mortality to bear. *We are now but children, and we speak as children, and understand and think as children* concerning these things; but in the other state we shall grow up to be men, and then we shall put away these childish thoughts. *Now we know but in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is imperfect shall be done away.* *Now we see through a glass darkly, (ἐν αἰνίγματι, in a riddle); but then we shall see face to face: now we know in part; but then we shall know even as also we are known, 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 11, 12.* as the Apostle discourseth excellently concerning this very matter.

No sooner shall we enter upon the joys of the other world, but our minds shall be raised to a strength and activity as much above that of the most knowing persons in this world, as the thoughts of the greatest philosopher and wisest man upon earth, are above the thoughts of a child or a fool. No man's mind is now so well framed to understand any thing in this world, as our understandings shall then be fitted for the knowledge of God, and of the things that belong to that state. In the mean time, let us bless God that he hath revealed so much of this happiness to us, as is necessary to excite and encourage us to seek after it.

II. The second thing to be considered concerning our future happiness, is the way and means whereby we may come to be made partakers of it. And that, in short, is, by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, in and through the mercies of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. Christ indeed is the author of our salvation, but obedience is the condition of it. So the Apostle tells us, that *Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*, Heb. v. 9. It is the grace of God in the gospel which brings or offers this salvation to us; but then it is by the denying of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and by living soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, that we are to wait for the blessed hope, Tit. ii. 11, 12. Our Saviour promises this happiness to the pure in heart: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. And elsewhere the scripture doth exclude all others from any share or portion in this blessedness: so the Apostle assures us, *that without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14.

And holiness is not only a condition, but a necessary qualification for the happiness of the next life. This is the force of St. John's reasoning, *We shall be like him, for we shall see him*. To see God, is to be happy; but unless we be like him, we cannot see him. The sight and presence of God himself would be no happiness to that man who is not like to God in the temper and disposition of his mind. And from hence the Apostle infers in the next verse, *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure*. So that, if we live wicked lives, if we allow ourselves in the practice of any known sin, we interrupt our hopes of heaven, and render ourselves unfit for eternal life. By this means we defeat all the designs of God's grace and mercy towards us, and salvation itself cannot save us, if we make ourselves incapable of that happiness which God offers. Heaven is in scripture called *an inheritance among them that are sanctified, and the inheritance of the saints in light*: so that it is not enough that this inheritance is promised to us, but we must be qualified and prepared for it, and *be made meet to be made partakers of it*.

And this life is the time of our preparation for our future state. Our souls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a temper and disposition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life, he shall retain in the next. It is true indeed, heaven perfects those holy and virtuous dispositions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his  
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main state : *He that is filthy, will be filthy still ; and he that is unrighteous, will be unrighteous still.* If we do not in a good degree mortify our lusts and passions here, death will not kill them for us, but we shall carry them with us into the other world. And if God should admit us so qualified into the place of happiness, yet we should bring that along with us, which should infallibly hinder us from being happy. Our sensual inclinations and desires would meet with nothing there that would be suitable to them ; and we should be perpetually tormented with those appetites which we brought with us out of this world, because we should find nothing there to gratify them withal. For, as the apostle says, in another sense, *the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* The happiness of heaven consists in such things as a wicked man hath no gust and relish for. So that if a covetous, or ambitious, or voluptuous man, were in heaven, he would be just like the rich man in hell, tormented with a continual thirst, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent desires ; and would not be able, amidst all the plenty and treasures of that place, to find so much as one drop of suitable pleasure and delight to quench and allay that heat. So likewise our fierce and unruly passions, if we should carry them with us into the other world, how inconsistent would they be with happiness ? They would not only make us miserable ourselves, but be a trouble to all those with whom we should converse. If a man of an envious and malicious, of a peevish and passionate temper, were admitted into the mansions of the blessed, he would not only be unhappy himself, but would disturb the quiet of others, and raise storms, even in those calm regions. Vain man ! that drest of being happy, without any disposition or preparation for it. To be happy, is to enjoy what we desire, and to live with those whom we love. But there is nothing in heaven suitable to the desires and appetites of a wicked man. All the joys of that place, and the delights of that state, are purely spiritual ; and are only to be relished by those who have *purified themselves, as God is pure.* But if thou be carnal and sensual, what are these things to thee ? What happiness would it be to thee to



see God, and to have him always in thy view, who was never in thy thoughts; to be tied to live for ever in his company, who is of a quite contrary temper and disposition to thyself, whose presence thou darest, and whom, whilst thou wast in this world, thou couldst never endure to think upon? So that the pleasures of heaven itself could signify no good or happiness to that man who is not so disposed as to take pleasure in them. Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt souls to live and breathe in; and the whole employment and conversation of that place; as it would be unsuitable, so would it also be unacceptable to a sensual and vitious person.

From all this it appears, how necessary it is for us to prepare ourselves for this blessed state, by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every lust and inordinate passion in our souls: for till this be done, we are not meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world. And thus I have done with the first thing implied in this phrase, *of having our conversation in heaven*, viz. the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven, or the happiness of that state; and of the way and means whereby that happiness is to be attained.

*Secondly*, The *having our conversation in heaven*, does imply likewise the effect which those considerations ought to have upon our hearts and lives. As,

1. To convince us of the vanity of this world. God hath on purpose made this world troublesome and uneasy to us, that there might be no sufficient temptation, to reasonable and considerate men, to take them off from the care and thought of their future happiness; that God and heaven might have no rival here below; that there might be nothing in this world that might pretend to our affection, or court us with any advantage, in comparison of everlasting life and glory.

When we come to die, and eternity shall present itself to our serious and waking thoughts, then things will put on another face; and those things which we valued so much in this life, will then appear to be nothing worth; but those things which are neglected, to be of infinite concernment to us, and worthy to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives. And if we  
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would consider these things in time; while the opportunities of life and health are before us, we might be convinced at a cheaper rate, and come to be satisfied of the vanity of this world before we despaired of the happiness of the other.

2. To make us very active and industrious to be as good, and to do as much good as we can in this life, that so we may be qualified and disposed for the happiness of the next. Men are usually very industrious for the things of this life, to be rich and great in the world: did we but value heaven half as much as it deserves, we should take infinitely more pains for that. So often as we consider the glories that are above, how does it accuse our sloth, and condemn our folly, that we are less concerned for our souls, than most men are for their bodies? that we will not labour half so much for an eternal inheritance, as men ordinarily do for these corruptible things?

Let us remember, that we are hastening apace to another world, and that our eternal happiness now lies at the stake. And how should it quicken our endeavours to have such a reward set before us, to have crowns and sceptres in our eyes? Would we but often represent to our minds the glorious things of another world, what fervours should we feel in our hearts? we should be all life, and spirit, and wing; and should do God's will, almost with the same readiness and delight, as the angels do, *who continually behold the face of their Father*. The consideration of heaven, and the firm persuasion of our future happiness, should actuate all the powers of our souls, and be continually inspiring us with new vigour in the ways of holiness and virtue. How should this thought swell our resolutions, and confirm our purposes of obedience, that if we have our *fruit unto holiness*, our *end will be everlasting life*?

3. To mitigate and lighten the evils and afflictions of this life. It is no great matter how rough the way be, provided we be sure that it leads to happiness. The incomparably greater good of the next life will, to a wise and considerate man, weigh down all the evils of this. And the scripture tells us, that there is no comparison between them: *The sufferings of this present time are not*

worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, Rom. viii. 18. The evils of this life afflict men more or less, according as the soul is fortified with considerations proper to support us under them. When we consider that we have but a little while to be here, that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly country, where we shall meet all the delights we can desire, it ought not to trouble us much to endure storms and foul ways, and to want many of those accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of travellers; and we must take things as we find them, and not look to have every thing just to our mind. These difficulties and inconveniencies will shortly be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. And when we are safely landed in our own country, with what pleasure shall we look back upon those rough and boisterous seas which we have escaped? The more trouble we have passed through, the kinder usage we shall find when we come to our Father's house. So the Apostle tells us, that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* When we come to heaven, our happiness shall then be as real as our miseries were here upon earth, and far greater, and more lasting. And what great matter is it though we suffer a while in this world, provided we escape the endless unsufferable torments of the next? though we have not our good things in this life, if infinitely greater be reserved for us, and we shall receive them with interest in the other?

Several of the evils and calamities of this life would be insufferable indeed, if there were nothing better to be hoped for hereafter. If this were true, Christians would not only be of all men, but of all creatures, the most miserable. But our religion hath abundantly assured us to the contrary. And the assurance of this was that which made the primitive Christians to embrace sufferings with so much cheerfulness; *to glory in tribulation, and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and more enduring substance.* The seven brethren, in the history of the Maccabees, upon this persuasion, would not accept deliverance,

ance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. That storm of stones which was poured upon St. Stephen, was no more to him than a common shower, when he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus (in whose cause he suffered) standing on the right hand of God.

4. To make us sincere in all our professions, words and actions. Did men firmly believe the rewards of another world, their religion would not be only in shew and pretence, but in life and reality; no man would put on a form of godliness, that were destitute of the power of it: we should do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to God and our own consciences; and be as curious of our thoughts, and most retired actions, as if we were in an open theatre, and in the presence of the greatest assembly. For in the next life men shall not be rewarded for what they seemed to be, but for what they really were in this world. Therefore whatever we think, or speak, or do, we should always remember, that the day of revelation is coming, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed; when all disguises shall be laid aside, and every one's mask shall be taken off; and all our actions and designs shall be brought upon the public stage, and exposed to the view of men and angels: *There is nothing now hidden which shall not then be revealed, nor secret which shall not be made known.*

5. To arm us against the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the terror of it is infinitely increased by the fearful apprehensions of what may follow it. But the comfortable hopes of a blessed immortality do strangely relieve the fainting spirits of dying men, and are able to reconcile us to death, and in a great measure to take away the terror of it. I know that the thoughts of death are dismal even to good men; and we have never more need of comfort and encouragement, than when we are conflicting with this last enemy; and there is no such comfortable consideration to a dying man, as the hopes of a happy eternity. He that looks upon death only as a passage to glory, may welcome the messengers of it, as bringing him the best and most joyful news that ever came to him in his whole life; and no man can stay

stay behind in this world with half the comfort that this man leaves it.

And now I have done with the two things implied in this phrase, of *having our conversation in heaven*, viz. the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven, and the effect of these thoughts and considerations upon our hearts and lives.

I crave your patience but a little longer, till I make some reflections upon what hath been delivered concerning the happiness of good men after this life. I have told you, that it is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world; that it is great in itself, and eternal in its duration, and far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. And now, after all this, I am very sensible how much all that I have said comes short of the greatness and dignity of the thing. So that I could almost begin again, and make a new attempt upon this subject. And indeed who would not be loth to be taken off from so delightful an argument? Methinks it is good for us to be here, and let our minds dwell upon these considerations. We are unworthy of heaven, and unfit to partake of so great a glory, if we cannot take pleasure in the contemplation of those things now, the possession whereof shall be our happiness for ever.

With what joy then should we think of those *great and glorious things which God hath prepared for them that love him; of that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which fadeth not away, reserved for us in the heavens?* How should we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour, when we shall make our escape out of these prisons; when we shall pass out of *this howling wilderness into the promised land*; when we shall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill natured world; when we shall be past all storms, and secured from all further danger of shipwreck, and shall be safely landed in the regions of bliss and immortality?

O blessed time! when *all tears shall be wiped from our eyes*, and *death and sorrow shall be no more*; when *mortality shall be swallowed up of life*, and we shall enter upon the possession of all that happiness and glory which God hath promised, and our faith hath believed, and our hopes have raised us to the expectation of; when

we shall be eased of all our pains, and resolved of all our doubts, and be purged from all our sins, and be freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes, and have all this happiness secured to us beyond the power of time and change; when we shall know God and other things without study, and love him and one another without measure, and serve and praise him without weariness, and obey his will without the least reluctancy; and shall still be more and more delighted in the knowing, and loving, and praising, and obeying of God to all eternity.

How should these thoughts affect our hearts, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives? The great disadvantage of the arguments fetched from another world is this, that those things are at a great distance from us, and not sensible to us; and therefore are not apt to affect us so strongly, and to work so powerfully upon us. Now, to make amends for this disadvantage, we should often revive these considerations upon our minds, and inculcate upon ourselves the reality and certainty of these things, together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We should reason thus with ourselves: If good men shall be so unspeakably happy, and consequently wicked men so extremely miserable in another world; if these things be true, and will one day be found to be so, why should they not be to me as if they were already present? why should not I be as much afraid to commit any sin, as if hell were naked before me, and I saw the astonishing miseries of the damned? and why should I not be as careful to serve God, and keep his commandments, as if heaven were open to my view, and I saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, with crowns of glory in his hand ready to be set upon the heads of all those who continue faithful to him?

The lively apprehensions of the nearness of death and eternity, are apt to make mens thoughts more quick and piercing; and, according as we think ourselves prepared for our future state, to transport us with joy, or to amaze us with horror: for the soul that is fully satisfied of his future bliss, is already entered into heaven, has begun to take possession of glory, and has, as it were,

his blessed Saviour in his arms; and may say, with old Simeon, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* But the thoughts of death must needs be very terrible to that man, who is doubtful or despairing of his future condition. It would daunt the stoutest man that ever breathed, to look upon death, when he can see nothing but hell beyond it. When the apparition at Endor told Saul, *To-morrow, thou and thy sons shall be with me,* these words struck him to the heart; so that *he fell down to the ground, and there was no more strength left in him.* It is as certain that we shall die, as if an express messenger should come to every one of us from the other world, and tell us so: why should we not then always live as those that must die, and as those that hope to be happy after death? To have these apprehensions vigorous and lively upon our minds, this is *to have our conversation in heaven; from whence also we look for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.*

## S E R M O N IX.

Of the end of judgments, and the reason of their continuance.

ISAIAH ix. 12. 13.

*For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts.*

**I**N the former part of the 12th verse, the Prophet threatens that Israel should be brought into great distress, and be set upon by enemies on every side, *the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind;* and that they should devour Israel with open mouth. And though this



was like to be a very sore and dreadful judgment; yet he foretells, that this would not stay God's hand, nor satisfy his anger; because he foresaw, that they would still grow worse, and continue impenitent: *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts.*

In which words there are these two things very useful at all times, but at this time especially most proper and seasonable for our consideration.

1. The design and intention of God in sending judgments upon a people; and that is, to reclaim them from their sins; implied in these words, *For the people turneth not to him that smiteth them*: which intimate to us, that this is the end which God aims at in his judgments, to take us off from our sins, and to bring us to himself.

2. The reason of the continuance of God's judgments; because the people were not reclaimed by them. And this is fully expressed in the text: that therefore *God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still; because the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, &c.*

Of these two I crave leave to speak, as plainly and briefly as I can.

1. The design and intention of God in sending judgments upon a people; and that is, to reclaim them from their sins. This indeed is the intention of all God's dispensations towards us in this world. The end of all his mercies and benefits is, to take us off from sin, and to oblige and win us to our duty. So the Apostle tells us, Rom. ii. 4. that the design of God's *goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance towards us, is to lead us to repentance.*

And this is the way wherein God delights to deal with us. The way of judgment and severity is that which he is more averse from; a course which he unwillingly takes with us, and not without some difficulty and reluctance. *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*: and were it not that we were such perverse creatures, as not to be wrought upon by kindness, so wild as not to be tamed by gentle usage, God would not handle us in any other way. It is our obstinacy and untractableness

untractableness to the methods of his goodness which constraineth, and almost forceth him against his inclination, to take the rod into his hand, and to chastise us with it. He would draw us *with the cords of love and the bands of a man*, as he expresseth himself in the Prophet; but we will not follow him: and therefore we provoke him to turn those cords into whips, and to change the gentle methods of his kindness into ways of harshness and severity.

And yet, when he comes to take this course with us, he still, like a kind and tender-hearted father, aims at our benefit and advantage. He designs kindness to the sons of men, by all those judgments which do not kill them, and cut them off from the opportunity and possibility of improving them. If he sends evils upon us, it is that thereby he may do us some greater good: if he afflicts us, it is not because it is pleasant to him to deal harshly with us, but because it is profitable and necessary for us to be so dealt with: and if at any time he embitter our lives by miseries and sufferings, it is because he is loth to see us perish in pleasant ways, and chuseth rather to be somewhat severe towards us, than suffer us to be utterly undone.

This Moses declares to have been the great end of all the severe providences of God towards the people of Israel in their long wandering in the wilderness, and all the difficulties and hardships they were there exercised withal for the space of forty years: Deut. viii. 15, 16. *Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions, &c. that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.*

So that the afflicting providences of God are not only apt in their own nature to do us good, but, which is a more express argument of the divine goodness, God intends and aims at this end by them: he does not send judgments upon this theatre of the world for his sport and pastime, nor set on one part of his creation to bait another for his own diversion: he does not, like some of the cruel Roman Emperors, take pleasure to exercise men with dangers, and to see them play bloody prizes before him.

Nay,

Nay, he does nothing that is severe out of humour and passion; as our earthly parents many times do. Indeed he is angry with us for our sins; but yet so as still to pity our persons: and when his providence makes use of any sharp and cutting instruments, it is with this merciful design, to let out our corruption; if he casts us into the furnace of affliction, it is that he may refine and purify us from our dross.

So that though the judgments of God be evils in themselves, yet, considering the intentions of God in them, they are no real objections against his goodness, but rather arguments for it; as will appear if we consider these three things.

1. That the judgments of God are proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind.

2. They are proper for the prevention of far greater evils of the same kind.

3. They are not only proper to these ends, but in many cases very necessary.

1. The judgments of God are very proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind; I mean the evil of sin. We take wrong measures of things, when we judge those to be the greatest evils which afflict our bodies, wound our reputation, and impoverish our estates. For those certainly are far the greatest which affect our noblest part; which vitiate our understandings, and deprave our wills, and wound and defile our souls. What corrupt humours are to the body, that sin is to the souls of men; their disease, and their death.

Now, it is very agreeable with the goodness and mercy of the divine providence, to administer to us whatever is proper for the cure of so great an evil. If we make ourselves sick, that is our own folly, and no fault of the physician: but we are beholden to him, if he recover us, though it be by very bitter and displeasing means. All temporal judgments which are short of death, are properly medicinal: and if we will but suffer them to have their kindly operation upon us, they will work a cure; and how grievous and distasteful soever they may be for the present, they will prove mercies and blessings in the issue. Upon this account David reckons afflictions among the happy blessings of his life: Psal. cxix. 71. *It is good*

good for me (says he) that I have been afflicted; and he gives the reason of it in the same Psalm, v. 67. *Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now I have learned thy precepts.*

So that though all afflictions are evils in themselves, yet they are good for us; because they discover to us our disease, and tend to our cure. They are a sensible argument and conviction to us, of the evil and danger of sin. We are commonly such *fools* as Solomon speaks of, who *make a mock of sin*; and, like children, will be playing with the edge of it, till it cut and wound us. We are not sufficiently sensible how great an evil it is, till we come to feel the dismal effects and consequences of it. And therefore, to rectify our apprehensions concerning it, God makes us suffer by it. Thus Elihu describes to us the happy effect of afflictions upon sinners, Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10. *If they be bound in fetters, and held in cords of affliction; then God sheweth them their work, and their transgression that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from their iniquity.* God doth but invite and intreat us by his mercies; but his judgments have a more powerful and commanding voice. *When he holds men in cords of affliction, then he openeth their ear to discipline.* In prosperity, we are many times incapable of counsel and instruction; but when we are under God's correcting hand, then we are fit to be spoken withal.

2. The judgments of God are likewise proper for the preventing of far greater evils of the same kind; I mean further punishments. In sending of temporal judgments upon sinners, God usually proceeds with them by degrees. First he lets fly several single shots at them; and if upon these they will take warning and come in, they may prevent the broadsides and vollies of his wrath.

But the great advantage of all is, that temporal judgments may prove to us the opportunities of preventing the miserable and unspeakable torments of a long eternity. For all judgments which are not final, leaving men a space for repentance, have in them the mercy of a reprieve; which, by a serious and timely return to God, may be improved into a pardon.

Besides that adversity and afflictions do usually dispose  
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men, and put them into a fit temper for repentance. They fix our minds, and make us serious; and are apt to awaken us to consideration, and suggest to us such thoughts and meditations as these. If temporal evils be so grievous, how insupportable then will be the extreme and endless torments of the next life? If in this day of God's grace and patience we sometimes meet with such severity, what may we not look for in the day of vengeance? If these drops of God's wrath which now and then fall upon sinners in this world, fill them with so much anguish and affliction, how deplorably miserable will those wretches be upon whom the storms of his fury shall fall? Who would venture to continue in sin, when the greatest miseries and calamities which we feel in this life, are but a small and inconsiderable earnest of those woeful wages which sinners shall receive in the day of recompence.

3. The judgments of God are not only proper to these ends, but in many cases very necessary. Our condition many times is such as to require this severe way of proceeding; because no other course that God hath taken, or can take with us, will probably do us good. God does not delight in the miseries and calamities of his creatures; but we put him upon these extremities; or rather his own goodness and wisdom together do prompt and direct him to these harsh and rigorous ways. May be we have brought ourselves into that dangerous state, and the malignity of our distemper is such, that it is not to be removed without violent physic, and that cannot be administered to us without making us deadly sick.

So that the judgments of God, which are many times *abroad in the earth*, are nothing else but the wise methods which the great physician of the world uses for the cure of mankind. They are the rods of his school, and the discipline of his providence, that *the inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness*. They are a merciful invention of heaven, to do men that good which many times nothing else will, and to work that blessed effect upon us which neither the wise counsels and admonitions of God's word, nor his milder and gentler dealings with us, can usually attain.

Thus we find in the parable, Luke xv. that the providence of God makes use of hunger and extreme necessity

to bring home the prodigal; and by him our Saviour represents to us the temper of most sinners. For till we have spent that stock of mercies which God hath given us; till we come to be pinched with want, and are ready to perish, we are not apt to entertain thoughts of returning to our Father.

It may be there are some sinners who are more tractable, and easy to be reduced to goodness, that are not so headstrong and obstinate in their way, but that they may be reclaimed by milder and softer means. But there are likewise a great many senseless and outrageous sinners who are madly and furiously bent upon their own ruin. Now, to treat these fairly, with the allurements of kindness, and the gentle arts of persuasion, would be to no purpose: the only way that is left of dealing with them is, rigour and severity. When sinners are thus beside themselves, something that looks like cruelty is perhaps the greatest mercy that can be shown to them; nothing so proper for such persons as a dark room, and a spare diet, and severe usage: *A rod for the back of fools*, as the wise man speaks.

Thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to, namely, the merciful design and intention of God in sending judgments upon a people; which is, to bring them to repentance, and by repentance to prevent their ruin. I proceed to the

II. The reason of the continuance of God's judgments; because the people were not reclaimed by them: Therefore *his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still*; because *the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts*.

And how can it be expected it should be otherwise, when incorrigibleness under the judgments of God is a provocation of so high a nature, a sign of a most depraved and incorrigible temper, and an argument of the greatest obstinacy in evil? Upon this account we find, that the Holy Spirit of God in scripture brands Ahaz as a singular and remarkable sort of sinner, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. because *in the time of his distress he sinned yet more against the Lord*. The longer Pharaoh and the Egyptians resisted the judgments of God, the more still they were hardened, and the more they were plagued. Lev. xxvi.

12.—28. after God had there threatened his people with several sore judgments for their sins, he tells them, that if they will not be reformed by all these things, he will punish them seven times more, and after that seven times more, for their sins. And if in such a case the just God will punish seven times more, we may safely conclude, that sins after judgments are seven times greater.

So likewise, Deut. xxviii. after a long and dreadful catalogue of curses there denounced against the people of Israel in case of their disobedience, God at last threatens them with a foreign enemy that should *distress them in their gates*; and if they would not be reclaimed by all this, he tells them, that he hath still more and greater judgments for them in store: v. 58 and 59. *If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that thou mayest fear this great and glorious name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful.* If we be of so strange and monstrous a disposition as to grow worse under judgments, God will deal with us after an unusual and prodigious manner; he will make our *plagues wonderful*.

This incorrigible temper the Prophets of old every where make the great aggravation of the sin of Israel: Is. i. 4, 5. *Ab! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity.* And, after a great many other expressions to set forth what heinous sinners they were, he sums up all in this, that they were so far from being reformed by the several judgments of God which had been inflicted upon them, that they were the worse for correction: *Why should they be stricken any more? they will revolt more and more.* So likewise, Hos. vii. 9, 10. Ephraim, though brought very low, is represented as of the same refractory temper: *Strangers have devoured his strength, &c. but they do not return to the Lord, nor seek him for all this.* I will mention but one text more, and methinks it bears but too near a resemblance with our own condition, both in respect of the judgments which have been upon us, and our carriage under them, Amos iv. where God upbraids his people several times with this, as the great aggravation of their sins, that they continued impenitent under all those terrible judgments of God which had been upon them: *I have sent among you (says he) famine, and then pestilence,*



and then the sword, and last of all a terrible fire, which had almost utterly consumed them: v. 11. *I have overthrown some of you, as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: ye have ye not returned unto me.* And because all these judgments had not been effectual to reclaim them, he tells them, that he was resolved to go on in punishing; and therefore he bids them to expect it, and prepare themselves for it: v. 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* When God hath begun to punish a people, and they are not amended by it, the honour of his justice is concerned to proceed, and not to give over. By every sin that we commit, we offend God; but if he smite us, and we stand out against him, then do we contend with him, and strive for mastery. And when the sinner is upon these stubborn and intolerent terms, then *prepare to meet thy God*: A bitter sarcasm; as if man could be a match for God, and a poor weak creature in any ways able to encounter him to whom power belongs. There is a severe expression concerning God's dealing with such perverse and obstinate sinners, Psal. xviii. 26. *With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward*; or, as the words may more properly and conveniently be rendered, *With the froward thou wilt wrestle.* God will not be outbraved by the sins of men; and therefore, if we continue impenitent, we have all the reason in the world to expect that God will go on to punish.

But to come nearer to ourselves, and to consider our own case, which is in truth so very bad, that we may almost be afraid to consider it. The wise and good God, like a prudent and indulgent father, hath used all the arts of his providence towards this nation to reclaim us. He hath invited us to him by many blessings, but we would not come. So (to borrow an apt illustration from \* a great divine of our own) we have forced him to deal with us as Absalom did with Joab: he sent one civil message to him after another, but he would not come; at last he sets on fire his corn-field, to try whether that would bring him. This course God hath taken with us. We would not be persuaded by messages of kindness, by his  
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many blessings and favours, to return to him; and therefore hath he sent amongst us the terrible messengers of his wrath. First we were engaged in a foreign war; and though God was pleased to give us some considerable success in it, yet it seems our provocations were so great, that he was resolved to punish us. He was loth to let us *fall into the hands of men*, and therefore he took the work into his own hand, and punished us himself, by sending a pestilence amongst us, the most and most destructive that hath befallen this nation for many ages. But we did not upon this return to him; and therefore his fierce anger kindled a fearful fire amongst us, which hath laid the honour of our nation, one of the greatest and richest cities in the world, in the dust; and that by so sudden and irresistible, so dismal and amazing a devastation, as in all the circumstances of it is scarce to be paralleled in any history.

I doubt not but most of us were mightily affected with this judgment whilst it was upon us. So astonishing a calamity could not but make us open our eyes a little, and awaken us to consideration. Even the rich man in the gospel, though he had all his lifetime been immersed in sensuality, yet could not but *lift up his eyes when he was in flames*.

And surely God expects that such judgments as these should not only rouse us a little for the present, but that they should have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a thorough and lasting reformation amongst us; but yet I am afraid that this dreadful fire hath had no other influence upon us, but what it uses to have upon metals, which are only melted by it for the present, but when the fire is removed, they suddenly cool, and return to their former hardness.

One would have thought, that the sense of such a calamity as this should have remained longer upon us. Methinks God seemed to say to us after this judgment, as he did once to Jerusalem, Zeph. iii. 7. *Surely thou wilt fear me; thou wilt receive instruction*. But we, like them, have been but the more forward to provoke him: *They rose early, and corrupted their doings*: we have, after all this, *hardened our hearts from his fear, and refused to return*. And therefore God is now come to one

of his last judgments: *Our enemy distresteth us in our gates.* God hath begun to let us fall into the hands of men; and, by giving our enemies a sudden and fatal advantage upon us, hath smitten us with a *breach great as the sea.*

These were terrible calamities indeed, to come so thick and so swiftly upon us, *like desolation, and as a whirlwind.* Such a quick succession of judgments, treading almost upon one another's heels, does but too plainly declare that God is highly incensed against us. For surely these are not the wounds of a friend, but the terrible assaults of an enemy: they do not look like the displeasure of a father, but the severity of a judge; not like visitation, but like vengeance.

And, besides these more visible judgments upon the nation, we are by a secret curse of God insensibly decayed in our riches and strength; we are, I know not how, strangely impoverished in the midst of plenty, and almost undone by victories: and, which adds to our misery, few among us seem to be sufficiently sensible of it, or to take any notice by what silent steps and imperceptible degrees, like gray hairs, and the infirmities of old age, poverty and weakness are stealing in upon us. So that we may fitly apply to ourselves what the Prophet says of Ephraim, *Hos. vii. 9. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, and yet he knoweth it not.*

And our condition, as we are a church, is not much better. How is this famous Protestant church of ours, which was once the admiration of her friends, and the envy of her enemies, sunk and declined in her glory, and reduced into a very narrow compass? so that she is left like *the daughter of Zion, II. i. 8. as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city;* straitened and hemmed in on all parts, by the impudence of Atheism, the insolencies of Popery, and the turbulency of faction; all which do every day visibly and apace gain ground upon her, and distress her on every side: just as the condition of the Jewish church is described before my text, *The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, both ready to devour Israel with open mouth.*

And surely it is not for nothing that God hath brought us thus low, that he hath sent all these judgments upon

us, and that he doth still threaten us with more. The reason is plain; because we are still impenitent: *The people turneth not to him that smiteth them.* There hath been almost an universal degeneracy amongst us, and there is still, I fear, a general impenitency: *The people turneth not, &c.* Notwithstanding all those dismal calamities which our eyes have seen, wickedness doth still prevail in the nation, and overflows it like a mighty deluge, so as to overspread all ranks and orders of men: and not only so, but is grown impudent, and appears *with a whore's forehead*; all kind of modesty seems to have forsaken the sinners of this age.

And is this repentance? to live in filthy and abominable vults; to tear the name of God by horrid oaths and imprecations; to be Atheistical and profane; and, by an unexampled boldness, to turn the word of God itself, and the gravest and most serious matters of religion, into raillery? This is not *to turn to him that smiteth us*; but to turn upon him, and finite him again. And yet such crying and clamorous sins as these, are almost come to be the garb and fashion of the nation, and to be accounted the wit and gallantry of the age.

And shall not God visit for these things? shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Yes; he hath visited; and it is for these things that *the wrath of God* hath been so manifestly revealed from heaven against us. For this cause *misery and destruction* have been in our way, and *the way of peace* have we not known, because there hath been *no fear of God before our eyes.* Hence it is, that *God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still*; because *the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts.*

But do not we seek God? Do we not every day acknowledge our sins to him, and pray that he would have mercy upon us miserable offenders, and grant that we may hereafter live godly, righteous and sober lives? Do not we seek the Lord of hosts, when we continually beg of him to save and deliver us from the hand of our enemies? Indeed we do thus seek him; but we should first turn to him; otherwise if we hope our prayers will prevail with God to do us good, we do but trust in lying words. If we go on in our sins, our very prayers will become sin,

and increase our guilt : for the *prayer of the wicked*, that is, of one that is resolved to continue so, is *an abomination to the Lord*. Can we think it reasonable for men to address themselves to God after this manner : “ Lord, “ though we have no mind to turn to thee, yet we pray “ thee turn away thine anger from us ; though we are “ resolved not to forsake our sins, yet we make no doubt “ but that thy mercy will forgive them. Give peace in “ our time, O Lord, that we may pursue our lusts se- “ curely and without disturbance ; deliver us, we pray “ thee, from the hands of our enemies, that we may sin “ against thee without fear all the days of our lives ? ” Would it not be horrible impudence and impiety to put up any such petitions to God ? And yet this, I fear, is the most genuine interpretation of our prayers and lives compared together.

And if this be our case, what can we expect ? God may give us peace with our enemies, but then he will find out some other way to punish us : for if we still persist in our Atheism and profaneness, in our contempt of God and of his holy worship, in our scorn and derision of religion, in our abominable lusts and horrid impieties, what can we look for, but that God should be *angry with us until he have consumed us, and there be no escaping* ? Nothing can be a sadder presage of our ruin, than not to be reformed by those dreadful judgments of God which have been upon us. This was that which brought final destruction upon the Egyptians in the Red sea, that they had held out so obstinately against so many judgments, and had been *hardened under ten plagues*. To be impenitent, after such severe corrections, is to poison ourselves with that which is intended for our physic, and, by a miraculous kind of obstinacy, to turn the rods of God into serpents.

And now perhaps some will be apt to say, that these are things fit for men of our profession ; because it is our trade, and we live by it. Indeed they are so ; things very fit to be said, and withal very fit for every one to consider, who professeth himself a Christian, and who owns the belief of a God, and a providence, and another world. And if they be so, where is the fault ? Is it, that there is a peculiar profession of men, whose proper

work it is to tell men of their faults, and to persuade them to reform? No; there is no harm in that neither. Is it then, that they live by their profession, and yet would be believed? Yes; there lies the force of the objection. To which I shall only at present return this answer, That men do not argue thus in other cases, when yet the reason seems to be the very same. In matters that concern their bodies and estates, the physician and the lawyer are believed, though it is verily thought that they live by their professions as well as we; why then should men deal so partially and unequally only with their souls? Were we not moved by better principles, and swayed by the arguments and considerations of another world, we might, for ought we know, with every whit as much advantage to ourselves, suffer men to be quiet and to sleep on securely in their sins; if we did not believe ourselves in these matters, what should hinder but that we might with as much gravity and confidence cry, Peace, peace, when there is no peace; and flatter men with as much art, and as good a grace, as any of those can do who live delicately, and wear soft clothing?

But *we believe* the threatenings of God, and *therefore do we speak.* We know the terrors of the Lord, and therefore we endeavour to persuade men. And oh! that we could persuade them to break off their sins by righteousness, and to turn every one from the evil of his way, and from the violence that is in his hands: and then who can tell but God may turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

The good God make us all wise to know in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes; and grant that we may all turn to him that hath smitten us, by repentance, and real reformation of our lives; that God may be pleased to turn away his anger from us, and to stretch out his hand for our deliverance. Which we humbly beg of him for the sake of Christ. To whom, with the Father, &c.

## S E R M O N X.

## Of the deceitfulness and danger of sin.

H E B. iii. 13.

*Exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

**A**Mong the many considerations which the word of God and our own reason offer to us, to discourage us from sin, this is none of the least considerable, that he that once engages in a vicious course, is in danger to proceed in it, being insensibly trained on from one degree of wickedness to another; so that the farther he advances, his retreat grows the more difficult; because he is still pushed on with a greater violence. All error, as well of practice as of judgment, is endless; and when a man is once out of the way, the farther he shall go on, the harder he will find it to return into the right way. Therefore there is great reason why men should be so often cautioned against the beginnings of sin; or if they have been so unhappy as to be engaged in a bad course, why they should be warned to break it off presently, and without delay; lest by degrees they be hardened in their wickedness, till their case grow desperate, and past remedy. And to this purpose is the Apostle's advice here in the text: *Exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

From which words I shall,

1. Endeavour to represent to you the growing danger of sin, and by what steps and degrees bad habits do insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil course.

2. I shall, from this consideration, take occasion to shew, what great reason and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to rescue them out of it. And then,



3. I shall apply myself to the duty here in the text, of exhorting men with all earnestness and importunity, to resist the beginnings of sin; or, if they be already entered upon a wicked course, to make haste out of this dangerous state; *lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

*First*, I shall endeavour to represent to you the growing danger of sin, and by what steps and degrees bad habits do insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil course. All the actions of men which are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have something of difficulty in them when we begin to practise them, because at first we are rude and unexercised in that way; but after we have practised them a while, they become more easy; and when they are easy, we begin to take pleasure in them; and when they please us, we do them frequently, and think we cannot repeat them too often; and by frequency of acts a thing grows into a habit; and a confirmed habit is a second kind of nature; and so far as any thing is natural, so far it is necessary, and we can hardly do otherways; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. For, by virtue of a habit, a man's mind or body becomes pliable and inclined to such kind of actions as it is accustomed to, and does as it were stand bent and charged such a way; so that, being touched and awakened by the least occasion, it breaks forth into such or such actions. And this is the natural progress of all habits indifferently considered, whether they be good or bad.

But vicious habits have a greater advantage, and are of a quicker growth. For the corrupt nature of man is a rank soil, to which vice takes easily, and wherein it thrives apace. The mind of man hath need to be prepared for piety and virtue; it must be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains. But vices are weeds that grow wild, and spring up of themselves. They are in some sort natural to the soil, and therefore they need not be planted and watered; it is sufficient, if they be neglected and let alone. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder, if occasion and temptation easily draw it forth.

But

But that we may take a more distinct account of the progress of sin, and by what steps vice gains upon men, I shall mark out to you some of the chief and more observable gradations of it.

1. Men begin with lesser sins. No man is perfectly wicked on the sudden. *Sunt quædam vitiorum elementa*, Juven. "There are certain rudiments of vice," in which men are first entered; and then they proceed by degrees to greater and fouler crimes; for sin hath its infancy and tender age, and its several states of growth. Men are not so totally degenerate, but at first they are ashamed when they venture upon a known sin, though it be but small in comparison. Hence it is, that at first men are very solicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuses; but, after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too visible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them; and from thence they come by degrees to take pleasure in them, and in those that do the same things.

2. After men have been some time initiated in these lesser sins, by the commission of these they are prepared and disposed for greater; such as lay waste the conscience, and offer more violence to the light and reason of their minds. By degrees a sinner may grow to be so hardy as to attempt those crimes, which at first he could not have had the thought of committing without horror: like Hazael, who when he was told by the prophet Elisha, what barbarous cruelties he should one day be guilty of towards the people of Israel, when he should come to be king of Syria, he abominated the very thought and mention of them: *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* and yet, for all this, we know he did it afterwards. It is true indeed, when a sinner is first tempted to the commission of a more gross and notorious sin, his conscience is apt to boggle and start at it; he doth it with great difficulty and regret; the terrors of his own mind, and the fears of damnation, are very troublesome to him; but his trouble wears off by degrees; and that which was at first difficult, does by frequent practice and long custom become tolerable.

3. When a man hath proceeded thus far, he begins to put off shame, one of the greatest restraints from sin which

which God hath laid upon human nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to restrain and hold us in. At first setting out upon a vitious course, men are a little nice and delicate; like young travellers, who at first are offended at every speck of dirt that lights upon them; but after they have been accustomed to it, and have travelled a good while in foul ways, it ceaseth to be troublesome to them to be dashed and bespattered.

4. After this it is possible men may come to approve their vices: for if mens judgments do not command their wills, and restrain their lusts, it is great odds, in process of time the vitious inclinations of their wills will put a false bias upon their judgments; and then it is no wonder if men come to boast of their sins, and to glory in their vices, when they are half persuaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that some men have gotten so perfect a habit of some sins, as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them: as in the case of swearing; which some men have so accustomed themselves to, that, without any consideration, they do of course put an oath or two into every sentence that comes from them. And it hath been observed of some persons, that they have told an untruth so often, and averred it with so much confidence, till at last, forgetting that it was a lie at first, they themselves have in process of time believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedness, men commonly proceed to draw in others, and to make proselytes to their vices. Now, this signifies not only a great approbation of sin, but even a fondness for it, when men are not content to sin upon their own single accounts, but they must turn zealous agents and factors for the devil; become teachers of sin and *ministers of unrighteousness*, and are religiously concerned to propagate, together with their theistical principles, their lewd practices, and to draw followers and disciples after them.

And when they are arrived to this height, it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to resist the means of their recovery; and to quarrel against all the remedies that

that shall be offered to them, and to count those the greatest enemies, who have so much courage and kindness as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wise counsels of God's word and the most gentle and prudent admonitions in the world, when they are tendered to such persons, serve only to provoke their scorn or their passion. And surely that man is in a sad case, that is so disposed, that, in a probability, he will turn the most effectual means of his amendment into the occasion of new and greater sins.

But that which renders the condition of such persons much more sad and deplorable, is, that all this while God is withdrawing his grace from them; for every degree of sin causeth the Holy Spirit of God, with all his blessed motions and assistances, to retire farther from them: and not only so, but the devil, that evil spirit which the scripture tell us *works effectually in the children of disobedience*, does, according as men improve wickedness, get a greater and a more established dominion over them. For as they who are reclaimed from an evil course, are said, in scripture, to be *rescued out of the snare of the devil*, and to be *turned from the power of Satan unto God*; so, on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of sin, so much the farther they depart from God, from under the influence of his grace and the care of his protection and providence; and they give the devil, who is not apt to neglect his advantage upon them, greater opportunities every day to gain a firmer possession of them.

And thus, by passing from one degree of sin to another, the sinner becomes hardened in his wickedness and does insensibly slide into that, in which, without miraculous grace of God, he is like for ever to continue. For the mind of man, after it hath been long accustomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almost as hard to be rectified, as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to its first straightness. The scripture speaks some that *commit sin with greediness*, and that *drink iniquity as the ox drinketh up water*; with a mighty appetite and thirst, as if they were not able to refrain from it: and, to express to us the miserable condition of such persons, it representeth them as perfect slaves

their vices, that have sold themselves to do wickedness, and *are led captive by Satan at his pleasure*. And when men have brought themselves to this pass, they are almost under a fatal necessity of sinning on. I do not believe that God hath absolutely predestinated any man to ruin; but, by a long course of wilful sin, men may in a sort predestinate themselves to it; and chuse wickedness so long, till it almost becomes necessary, and till they have brought themselves under all imaginable disadvantages of contributing any thing towards their own recovery; being bound in the chains of their own wickedness, and held in the cords of their sins: nay, like Samson, not only bound by those lusts which they have embraced, but likeways robbed of all their strength whereby they should break loose from those bonds. God grant that none of us may ever have the woful experience of it. But I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a sinner may arrive to that confirmed state of impiety, as almost totally to lose his liberty to do better. He may attain to that perfection in vice, as to continue to be a bad man upon the same account that the historian extravagantly says Cato was virtuous, *quia aliter esse non potuit*, Vell. Paterc. "because he could not be otherways." *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?* It is the scripture-comparison, to set forth to us how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodness that hath been long accustomed to do evil. He that is thus deeply engaged and intangled in a bad course, will scarce ever have the heart and resolution to break loose from it, unless he be forced violently out of it by some severe affliction, by a sharp sickness, or by a terrible calamity; or by the present apprehensions of death, and the terrors of a future judgment. Nor will these be effectual neither, to change such a person, without an extraordinary degree of God's grace; which, considering the greatness and the continuance of his provocations, he hath very little reason to expect or hope God should ever bestow upon him. Wretched man! that hast brought thyself into this miserable state, out of which there is but just a possibility left of thy being rescued; that hast neglected thy disease so long, till it is almost too late to apply remedies; that hast provoked God so far, and sin-

ned to such a prodigious height, that thou hast reason almost to despair both of his grace and assistance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I speak not this to discourage even the greatest of sinners from repentance. Tho' their case be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite desperate; *for those things which seem impossible with men, are possible with God.* But I speak it on purpose to stop sinners in their course, and to discourage men from going on in sin till they be hardened thro' the deceitfulness of it, and have brought themselves by insensible degrees into that dangerous and difficult state which I have all this while been representing to you. I come now to the

*Second* thing I propounded; which was, from this consideration, to shew what great reason and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to rescue them out of it. The Apostle directs this precept to all Christians: *Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;* that is, lest you be hardened by degrees, and finally ruined. And surely every man is concerned to do what in him lies to rescue his brother from so imminent a danger. It is every one's place and duty, to endeavour to save those whom he sees ready to perish: much more does it concern those who are peculiarly set apart for this work; I mean the ministers of God's holy word, whose proper office and business it is, to *exhort and warn every man day and night, who are set as watchmen to the house of Israel, and whose blood, in case any of them miscarry thro' our neglect, shall be required at our hands.* So that, if we believe the threatenings of God, which we declare to others; if we have any apprehension of the dreadful misery of another world; if we have any sense of our own duty and safety; if we have any pity for perishing souls: we cannot but be very importunate with sinners, to look about them, and to consider their danger, and to bethink themselves seriously of the miserable event and issue of a wicked life; we cannot but be earnest with them, to *break off their sins, and to give glory to God by repentance, before darkness come, and their feet stumble upon the dark mountains.* When we are convinced more fully than we can desire, that *misery and destruction are in their*

their ways; when we plainly see the *evil day* hastening towards them apace, and *destruction* coming upon them like a *whirlwind*; heaven above threatening them, and *hell* beneath moving herself to meet them at their coming: can we possibly do less, than to warn such persons to flee from the wrath which is to come; and, out of a sad apprehension of the danger that hangs over them, to caution them against it, and endeavour with all our might to rescue them from the misery which is ready to swallow them up? Indeed one would be apt to think it a very vain thing to dissuade men from being miserable; to use great vehemency of argument, to hinder a man from leaping into a pit, or from running into the fire; to take great pains to urge a sick man into a desire of health, and to make a prisoner contented to have his shackles knocked off, and to be set at liberty; one would think all this were perfectly needless: but yet we see in experience, sin is a thing of so stupefying a nature, as to make them insensible of their danger, altho' it be so near, and so terrible. It is not so with men in other cases. When we labour of any bodily distemper, it is much to find a man that is patient of his disease: but when our souls are mortally sick; that we should be contented with our condition, and fond of our disease; that we should fight with our physician, and spurn at our remedy; this surely is the height of distraction, for men to be thus absolutely bent upon their own ruin, and to resolve to make away themselves for ever. And we who are the messengers of God to men, must be born of the rocks, and have hearts harder than the nether millstone, if we can patiently look on, and endure to see men perish, without using our utmost endeavour to save them. Therefore I shall, in the

*Third* and last place, apply myself to this work of exhortation, the duty commanded here in the text. And here I shall address myself to two sorts of persons.

1. To persuade those who are yet innocent of great crimes, to resist the beginnings of sin, lest it gain upon them by degrees.

2. To press and urge those who are already entered upon a wicked course, that they would make haste out of this dangerous state, lest at last they be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.



I. To persuade those who are yet in some measure innocent, to resist the beginnings of sin, lest it gain upon them by degrees. Vice may easily be discouraged at first. It is like a slight disease, which is easy to be cured, but dangerous to be neglected: The first approaches of sin and temptation are usually very modest; but if they be not discountenanced, they will soon grow upon us, and make bolder attempts. Every inclination to sin, every compliance with temptation, is a going down the hill: while we keep our standing, we may command ourselves; but if we once put ourselves into violent motion downwards, we cannot stop when we please.

*Omne in præcipiti vitium stetit.*——

“All vice stands upon a precipice;” and to engage in any sinful course, is to run down the hill. And if we once let loose the propensions of our nature, we cannot gather in the reins, and govern them as we please. If we give way to presumptuous sins, they will quickly get dominion over us. It is much easier not to begin a bad course, than to put a stop to ourselves after we have begun it. *Stulta res est nequitiae modus*, Seneca: “It is a fond thing for a man to think to set bounds to himself in any thing that is bad;” to resolve to sin in number, weight and measure, with great temperance and discretion, and government of himself; that he will commit this sin, and then give over; entertain but this one temptation, and, after that, he will shut the door, and admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts, when they are once in motion, are like the raging sea, to which we can set no bounds, nor say to it, *Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further*. Sin is very cunning and deceitful, and does strangely gain upon men when they once give way to it. It is of a very bewitching nature, and hath strange arts of address and insinuation. The giving way to a small sin, does marvellously prepare and dispose man for a greater. By giving way to one little vice after another, the strongest resolution may be broken: for though it be not to be snapt in in sunder at once, yet by this means it is untwisted by degrees, and then it is easy to break it, one thread after another. It is scarce imaginable of what force one sinful action is to produce more: for sin is very teeming and fruitful; and though  
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there be no blessing annexed to it, yet it does strangely increase and multiply. As there is a connection of one virtue with another, so vices are linked together, and one sin draws many after it. When the devil tempts a man to commit any wickedness, he does, as it were, lay a long train of sins; and, if the first temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us then resist the beginnings of sin; because then we have most power, and sin hath least. This is the first.

2. To persuade those who are already engaged in a wicked course, to make haste out of this dangerous state. And there is no other way to get out of it, but by repentance; that is, by a real change and reformation of our lives; for herein the nature of true repentance does consist. And without this all the devices which men use to get rid of the guilt of their sins, are vain, and to no purpose. It is not to be done by a formal confession and absolution; nor by a long pilgrimage; nor by one of those little tickets from Rome, which they call *indulgences*. A wise man would much sooner persuade himself, that God will not at all punish the sins of men, than that he would forgive them so easily, and receive great offenders to favour upon such slight terms. Let us not deceive ourselves: there is one plain way to heaven, by sincere repentance, and a holy life; and there is no getting thither by tricks. And without this change of our lives, all our sorrow, and fasting, and humiliation for sin, which at this season we make profession of, will signify nothing. There is an excellent passage of the son of Sirach to this purpose, Eccles xxxiv. 25. 26. *He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? So it is with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things: who will hear his prayer? or what doth his humbling profit him?* There is this plain difference between trouble for sin, and repentance; sorrow only respects sins past, but repentance is chiefly preventive of sins for the future: and God therefore requires that we should be troubled for our sins, that we may resolve to leave them.

And, to oblige us to a vigorous and speedy resolution in this matter, let us consider that we have engaged too far already in a bad course; and that every day

our retreat will grow more dangerous and difficult; that by our delays we make work for a sadder and longer repentance, than that which we do now so studiously decline. Let us consider likewise, that our life is concerned in the case; that *except we repent and turn, we shall die*; and that the evil day may overtake us while we are deliberating whether we should avoid it or not: that vice is so far from being mortified by age, that by every day's continuance in it, we increase the power of it; and so much strength as we add to our disease, we certainly take from ourselves: and this is a double weakening of us, when we do not only lose our own strength but the enemy gets it, and employs it against us. The deceitfulness of sin appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this necessary work, and persuading them to hazard all, upon the unreasonable hopes of the mercy of God, and the uncertain resolution of a future repentance. I do not think there are any here but do either believe, or at least are vehemently afraid, that there is another life after this; and that a wicked life without repentance, must unavoidably make them miserable in another world; and that to cast off all at a death-bed repentance, puts things upon a mighty hazard. And they have a great deal of reason to think so: for, alas! how unfit are most men at such a time, for so great and serious a work as repentance is, when they are unfit for the smallest matters? and how hard is it for any man then to be assured of the truth and reality of his repentance, when there is no sufficient opportunity to make trial of the sincerity of it; I deny not the possibility of the thing: but it is much to be feared, that the repentance of a dying sinner is usually but like the sorrow of a malefactor, when he is ready to be turned off: he is not troubled that he hath offended the law; but he is troubled that he must die. For when death is ready to seize upon the sinner, and he feels himself dropping into destruction, no wonder if then the man's stomach come down, and he be contented to be saved; and, seeing he must stay no longer in this world, be desirous to go to heaven rather than hell; and, in order to that, be ready to give some testimonies of his repentance: no wonder if, when the rack is before him, this

this extort confession from him; and if, in hopes of a pardon, he make many large promises of amendment, and freely declare his resolution of a new and better life. But then it is the hardest thing in the world, to judge whether any thing of all this that is done under so great a fear and force, be real. For a sick man, as he hath lost an appetite to the most pleasant meats and drinks, so likewise his sinful pleasures, and fleshly lusts, are at the same time nauseous to him: and for the very same reason; for sickness having altered the temper of his body, he hath not at that time any gust or relish for these things. And now he is resolved against sin; just as a man that hath no stomach is resolved against meat. But if the fit were over, and death would but raise his siege, and remove his quarters a little farther from him; it is to be feared that his former appetite would soon return to him, and that he would sin with the same eagerness he did before. Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of our repentance at such a time, when we are conscious to ourselves that we did resolve to put off our repentance till we could sin no longer? Can we think it fit for any man to say thus to God in a dying hour: "Lord, now the world leaves me, I come to thee. I pray thee give me eternal life, who could never afford to give thee one good day of my life. Grant that I may live with thee, and enjoy thee for ever, who could never endure to think upon thee. I must confess that I could never be persuaded to leave my sins out of love to thee; but now I repent of them for fear of thee. I am conscious to myself that I would never do any thing for thy sake; but yet I hope thy goodness is such, that thou wilt forgive all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of my life, and accept of this forced submission which I now make to thee. I pray thee do not at last frustrate and disappoint me in this design which I have laid, of sinning while I live, and getting to heaven when I die?" Surely no man can think it fit to say thus to God; and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a man's repentance, who hath deferred it till he comes to die. I do not speak this to discourage repentance, even at that time. It is always the best thing we can do. But I would by all means discourage men from putting off so necessary a work

work till then. It is true indeed, when it is come to this, and a sinner finds himself going out of the world, if he have been so foolish, and so cruel to himself, as to put things upon this last hazard, repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do. This is his last remedy, and the only refuge he has to fly to; and this is that which the Minister in this case ought by all means to put the man upon, and earnestly to persuade him to. But when we speak to men in other circumstances, that are well, and in health, we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their souls upon such an uncertainty. For, to speak the best of it, it is a very dangerous remedy; especially when men have designedly contrived to rob God of the service of their best days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable sighs and tears at the hour of death. I desire to have as large apprehensions of the mercy of God as any man; but, withal, I am very sure that he is the hardest to be imposed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehensions of the Deity, can imagine him to be so easy, as to forgive men upon the least word and intimation of their minds, and to have such a fondness for offenders as would reflect upon the prudence of any magistrate and governor upon earth. God grant that I may sincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to die; and that I may never be so unwise as to venture all my hopes of a blessed eternity, upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with those excellent sayings of the son of Sirach, Eccles v. 6. 7. xvi. 11. 12. and xviii. 21. 22. *Say not, God's mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins. For mercy and wrath are with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out displeasure: and as his mercy is great, so are his corrections also. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed. Humble thyself before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be justified.*

## S E R M O N XI.

The hazard of being saved in the church of Rome.

I C O R. iii. 15.

*But he himself shall be saved; yet so, as by fire.*

**T**HE context is thus: *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest. For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so, as by fire.*

In these words the Apostle speaks of a sort of persons, who held indeed the foundation of Christianity, but built upon it such doctrines or practices as would not bear the trial; which he expresses to us by *wood, hay, and stubble*, which are not proof against the fire. Such a person, the Apostle tells us, hath brought himself into a very dangerous state, though he would not deny the possibility of his salvation: *He himself shall be saved; yet so, as by fire.*

That by *fire* here is not meant the fire of purgatory, as some pretend, who would be glad of any shadow of a text of scripture to countenance their own dreams, I shall neither trouble you nor myself to manifest; since the particle of similitude *ὡς* plainly shews, that the Apostle did not intend an escape out of the fire literally, but like to that which men make out of a house or town that is

on fire: especially since very learned persons of the church of Rome do acknowledge, that purgatory cannot be concluded from this text: nay, all that Estius contends for from this place, is, that it cannot be concluded from hence that there is no purgatory; which we never pretended, but only that this text doth not prove it.

It is very well known, that this is a proverbial phrase, used not only in scripture, but in profane authors, to signify a narrow escape out of a great danger: *He shall be saved; yet so, as by fire; δια πυρός, out of the fire.* Just as *δι ὕδατος* is used, 1 Pet. iii. 20. where the Apostle, speaking of the eight persons of Noah's family who escaped the flood, *διεσώθησαν δι ὕδατος*, they escaped out of the water. So here this phrase is to be rendered in the text, *He himself shall escape; yet so, as out of the fire.* The like expression you have, Amos iv. 11. *I have plucked them as a firebrand out of the fire.* And Jude, v. 23. *Others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire.* All which expressions signify the greatness of the danger, and the difficulty of escaping it; "as one who, when his house  
" at midnight is set on fire, and being suddenly wak'd,  
" leaps out of his bed, and runs naked out of the doors,  
" taking nothing that is within along with him, but  
" employing his whole care to save his body from the  
" flames;" as St. Chrysostom upon another occasion expresseth it. And so the Roman orator, who it is likely did not think of purgatory, useth this phrase: *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit*, Tully: "From  
" which judgment or sentence he escaped naked, as it  
" were out of a burning." And one of the Greek orators tells us, That "to save a man out of the fire, was a common proverbial speech," *Aristides*.

From the words thus explained, the observation that naturally ariseth is this, that men may hold all the fundamentals of Christian religion, and yet may superadd other things, whereby they may greatly endanger their salvation. What those things were which some among the Corinthians built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endangered their salvation, we may probably conjecture by what the Apostle reproves in this epistle, as the tolerating of incestuous marriages, communicating in idol-feasts, &c. and especially by the doctrine



trine of the false apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this epistle. And what their doctrine was, we have an account, Acts xv. viz. that they imposed upon the Gentile Christians circumcision, and the observation of the Jewish law, teaching, that *unless they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved.* So that they did not only build these doctrines upon Christianity; but they made them equal with the foundation, saying, that *unless men believed and practised these things, they could not be saved.*

In speaking to this observation, I shall reduce my discourse to these two heads.

1. I shall present to you some doctrines and practices which have been built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens salvation: and, to be plain, I mean particularly the church of Rome.

2. I shall enquire, whether our granting a possibility of salvation, though with great hazard, to those in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a reasonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himself to that church.

And there is the more reason to consider these things, when so many seducing spirits are so active and busy to pervert men from the truth, and when we see every day so many men and their religion so easily parted. For this reason these two considerations shall be the subject of the following discourse.

*First,* We will consider some doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens salvation. It is not denied by the most judicious Protestants, but that the church of Rome do hold all the articles of the Christian faith which are necessary to salvation; but that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our separation from them, is, the imposing of new doctrines and practices upon Christians as necessary to salvation, which were never taught by our Saviour or his Apostles; and which are either directly contrary to the

the doctrine of Christianity, or too apparently destructive of a good life. And I begin,

I. With their doctrines. And because I have no mind to aggravate lesser matters, I will single out four or five points of doctrine, which they have added to the Christian religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, nor owned in the first ages of Christianity. And the

First which I shall mention, and which, being once admitted, makes way for as many errors as they plead to bring in, is, their doctrine of infallibility. And that they are very stiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themselves where this infallibility is seated; whether in the Pope alone, or a council alone, or in both together, or in the diffusive body of Christians. But they are sure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice against it? Can any man think, that this privilege was at first conferred upon the church of Rome, and that Christians in all ages did believe it, and had constant recourse to it for determining their differences; and yet that that very church, which hath enjoyed and used it so long, should now be at a loss where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there should be such differences among them about that which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the least intimation in scripture, of this privilege conferred upon the Roman church; nor do the Apostles, in all their epistles, ever so much as give the least direction to Christians to appeal to the Bishop of Rome for a determination of the many differences which even in those times happened among them. And it is strange they should be so silent in this matter, when there were so many occasions to speak of it. If our Saviour had plainly appointed such an infallible judge of controversies for this very end, to decide the differences that should happen among Christians, it is strange that the ancient fathers, in their disputes with heretics, should never appeal to this judge: nay, it is strange they should not constantly do it in all cases, it being so short and expedite a way for the ending of controversies.

verfies. And this very confideration, to a wife man, is inftead of a thoufand arguments, to fatisfy him, that in thofe times no fuch thing was believed in the world.

Now, this doctrine of infallibility, if it be not true, is of fo much the more pernicious confequence to Chriftianity, becaufe the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it, in all their other errors, and gives them a pretence of affuming an authority to themfelves to impofe their own fancies and miftakes upon the whole Chriftian world.

2. Their doctrine about repentance, which confifts in confeffing their fins to the prieft; which, if it be but accompanied with any degree of contrition, does, upon abfolution received from the prieft, put them into a ftate of falvation, though they have lived the moft lewd and debauched lives that can be imagined. Than which nothing can be more plainly deftructive of a good life: for, if this be true, all the hazard that the moft wicked man runs of his falvation, is only the danger of fo fudden a death, as gives him no fpace for confeffion and abfolution: A cafe that happens fo rarely, that any man that is ftrongly addicted to his lufts, will be content to venture his falvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very insignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remiffion of fins may be had upon fuch cheap terms.

3. The doctrine of purgatory: by which they mean an eftate of temporary punifhments after this life, from which men may be releafed, and tranflated into heaven, by the prayers of the living, and the facrifice of the mafs. That this doctrine was not known in the primitive church, nor can be proved from fcripture; we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of that church; which is to acknowledge, that it is a fuperftructure upon the Chriftian religion. And though in one fenfe it be indeed a building of gold and filver upon the foundation of Chriftianity, confidering the vaft revenues which this doctrine, and that of indulgences, which depends upon it, brings into that church; yet I doubt not but, in the Apoftle's fenfe, it will be found to be hay and ftubble. But how ground-

less soever it be, it is too gainful a doctrine to easily parted withal.

4. The doctrine of transubstantiation. A hard word; but I would to God that were the worst of it: the thing is much more difficult. I have taken some pains to consider other religions that have been in the world, and I must freely declare, that I never yet, in any of them, met with any article or proposition, imposed upon the belief of men, half so unreasonable, and hard to be believed, as this is: and yet this, in the Romish church, is esteemed one of the most principal articles of the Christian faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in scripture, than for our Saviour's being substantially changed into all those things which are said of him, as that he is a rock, a vine, a door, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This doctrine hath not only no certain foundation in scripture, but I have a far heavier charge against it; namely, that it undermines the very foundation of Christianity itself. And, surely, nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the Christian doctrine, which destroys the reason of our belief of the whole. And that this doctrine does so, will appear evidently, if we consider what was the main argument which the Apostles used to convince the world of the truth of Christianity; and that was this, That our blessed Saviour, the author of this doctrine, wrought such and such miracles; and particularly, that he rose again from the dead. And this they proved, because they were eye-witnesses of his miracles, and had seen him, and conversed with him, after he was risen from the dead. But what if their senses did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied, but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! we will now suppose, as the church of Rome does, transubstantiation to have been one principal part of the Christian doctrine which the Apostles preached. But if this doctrine be true, then all mens senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein it is as hard for them to be deceived, as in any thing in the world: for two things can hardly be imagined more different, than a little bit of wafer, and the whole body of a man. So  
that

that the Apostles persuading men to believe this doctrine, persuaded them not to trust their senses; and yet the argument which they used to persuade them to this, was built upon the direct contrary principle, That mens senses are to be trusted. For if they be not, then, notwithstanding all the evidence the Apostles offered for the resurrection of our Saviour, he might not be risen; and so the faith of Christians was vain. So that they represent the Apostles as absurd as is possible, *viz.* going about to persuade men out of their senses, by virtue of an argument the whole strength whereof depends upon the certainty of sense.

And now the matter is brought to a fair issue. If the testimony of sense be to be relied upon, then transubstantiation is false; if it be not, then no man is sure that Christianity is true. For the utmost assurance that the Apostles had of the truth of Christianity, was the testimony of their own senses concerning our Saviour's miracles; and this testimony every man hath against transubstantiation. From whence it plainly follows, that no man, no not the Apostles themselves, had more reason to believe Christianity to be true, than every man hath to believe transubstantiation to be false. And we who did not see our Saviour's miracles, as the Apostles did, and have only a credible relation of them, but do see the sacrament, have less evidence of the truth of Christianity, than of the falsehood of transubstantiation.

But cannot God impose upon the senses of men, and represent things to them otherwise than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Most certainly. But then, we ought to be assured that he hath made such a revelation; which assurance no man can have, the certainty of sense being taken away.

I shall press the business a little farther. Supposing the scripture to be a divine revelation, and that these words, *This is my body*, if they be in scripture, must necessarily be taken in the strict and literal sense; I ask now, what greater evidence any man has, that these words, *This is my body*, are in the Bible, than every man has that the bread is not changed in the sacrament? Nay, no man has so much: for we have only the evidence of one sense,

that these words are in the Bible; but that the bread is not changed, we have the concurring testimony of several of our senses. In a word, if this be once admitted, that the senses of all men are deceived in one of the most plain sensible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a divine revelation to men; nor is there any way to confute the grossest impostures in the world: for if the clear evidence of all mens senses be not sufficient for this purpose, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will instance but in one doctrine more; and that shall be, their doctrine of deposing Kings in case of heresy, and absolving their subjects from their allegiance to them. And this is not a mere speculative doctrine, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Bishops of Rome; as every one knows that is versed in history. For the troubles and confusions which were occasioned by this very thing, make up a good part of the history of several ages.

I hope no body expects that I should take the pains to shew, that this was not the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles, nor of the primitive Christians. The Papists are many of them so far from pretending this, that in some times and places, when it is not seasonable and for their purpose, we have much ado to persuade them, that ever it was their doctrine. But if transubstantiation be their doctrine, this is: for they came both out of the same forge, I mean the council of Lateran, under Pope Innocent III. And if, as they tell us, transubstantiation was then established, so was this. And indeed one would think they were twins, and brought forth at the same time; they are so like one another, both of them so monstrously unreasonable.

II. I come now, in the second place, to consider some practices of the church of Rome, which I am afraid will prove as bad as her doctrines. I shall instance in these five.

1. Their celebrating of their divine service in an unknown tongue; and that not only contrary to the practice of the primitive church, and to the great end and design of religious worship, which is, the edification of those who are concerned in it, and it is hard to imagine

gine how men can be edified by what they do not understand; but likewise in direct contradiction to St. Paul, who hath no less than a whole chapter, wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly, as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain, that this practice was not condemned by St. Paul, or that it was allowed and used in the first ages of Christianity, need not be ashamed to set up for the defence of any paradox in the world.

2. The communion in one kind; and that notwithstanding that, even by their own acknowledgment, our Saviour instituted it in both kinds, and the primitive church administered it in both kinds. This, I must acknowledge, is no addition to Christianity, but a sacrilegious taking away of an essential part of the sacrament. For the cup is as essential a part of the institution as the bread; and they might as well, and by the same authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worshipping of images. Which practice, notwithstanding all their distinctions about it, which are no other but what the Heathens used in the same case, is as point blank against the second commandment, as a deliberate and malicious killing of a man is against the sixth. But if the case be so plain, a man would think, that at least the teachers and guides of that church should be sensible of it. Why, they are so; and afraid the people should be so too: and therefore, in their ordinary catechisms, and manuals of devotion, they leave out the second commandment, and divide the tenth into two, to make up the number; lest, if the common people should know it, their consciences should start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worshipping of the bread and wine in the eucharist, out of a false and groundless persuasion, that they are substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ. Which if it be not true, and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole world; then, by the confession of several of their own learned writers, they are guilty of gross idolatry.

5. The worship and invocation of saints and angels;



and particularly of the Virgin Mary; which hath now for some ages been a principal part of their religion. Now, a man may justly wonder that so considerable a part of religion as they make this to be, should have no manner of foundation in the scripture. Does our Saviour any where speak one word concerning the worshipping of her? Nay, does he not take all occasions to restrain all extravagant apprehensions and imaginations concerning honour due to her, as foreseeing the degeneracy of the church in this thing? When he was told, that his mother and brethren were without; *Who (says he) are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.* And when the woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the blessed mother of our Lord, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck!* our Saviour diverts to another thing: *Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apostles, in all their particular precepts and directions concerning prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to address ourselves to God, give the least intimation of praying to the Virgin Mary, or making use of her mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the practice of the church from the beginning, our Saviour and his Apostles would have been so silent about so considerable a part of religion; in so much that in all the epistles of the Apostles I do not remember that her name is so much as once mentioned? And yet the worship of her is at this day in the church of Rome, and hath been so for several ages, a main part of their public worship, yea and of their private devotions too; in which it is usual with them to say ten *Ave Marias* for one *Pater noster*; that is, for one prayer they make to almighty God, they make ten addresses to the blessed Virgin; for that is the proportion observed in their rosaries. He that considers this, and had never seen the Bible, would have been apt to think that there had been more said concerning her in scripture, than either concerning God, or our blessed Saviour; and that the New Testament were full from one end to the other, of precepts and exhortations to the worshipping of her: and yet, when all is done, **I challenge any man to shew me**

me so much as one sentence in the whole Bible, that sounds that way. And there is as little in the Christian writers of the first three hundred years. The truth is, this practice began to creep in among some superstitious people about the middle of the fourth century. And I remember particularly, that Epiphanius, who lived about that time, calls it the heresy of the women.

And thus I have given you some instances of several doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Christianity. Much more might have been said of them; but from what hath been said, any man may easily discern how dangerous they are to the salvation of men.

*Secondly*, I now proceed, in the second place, to consider, whether our granting a possibility of salvation, though with great hazard, to those in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a sufficient argument and encouragement to any man, to quit our church, and go to theirs. And there is the more need to consider this, because this is the great popular argument wherewith the emissaries and agents of that church are wont to assault our people. "Your church (say they) grants that a Papist may be saved; ours denies that a Protestant can be saved: therefore it is safest to be of our church, in which salvation, by the acknowledgment of both sides, is possible."

For answer to this, I shall endeavour to shew, that this is so far from being a good argument, that it is so intolerably weak and sophistical, that any considerate man ought to be ashamed to be caught by it. For either it is good of itself, and sufficient to persuade a man to relinquish our church, and to pass over to theirs, without entering into the merits of the cause on either side, and without comparing the doctrines and practices of both the churches together; or it is not. If it be not sufficient of itself to persuade a man to leave our church, without comparing the doctrines on both sides, then it is to no purpose, and there is nothing got by it: for if, upon examination and comparing of doctrines, the one appear to be true, and the other false; this alone is a sufficient inducement to any man, to cleave to that church

church where the true doctrine is found ; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be said, that this argument is good in itself, without the examination of the doctrine of both churches ; this seems a very strange thing, for any man to affirm, That it is reason enough to a man to be of any church, whatever her doctrines and practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her communion.

But they who use this argument, pretend that it is sufficient of itself ; and therefore I shall apply myself to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable weakness and insufficiency of it to satisfy any man's conscience, or prudence, to change his religion. And, to this end, I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies.

2. Give some parallel instances, by which it will clearly appear, that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And,

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

1. I shall shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies ; and that is this, That whatever different parties in religion agree in, is safest to be chosen. The true consequence of which principle, if it be driven to the head, is, to persuade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of natural religion ; for in these all religions do agree. For, if this principle be true, and signify any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the several parties in religion differ ; because that only is safe and prudent to be chosen, wherein all agree. So that this argument, if the foundation of it be good, will persuade farther than those who make use of it desire it should do ; for it will not only make men forsake the Protestant religion, but Popery too ; and, which is much more considerable, Christianity itself.

2. I will give some parallel instances, by which it will clearly be seen, that this argument concludes false. The Donatists denied the baptism of the Catholics to be good, but the Catholics acknowledged the baptism of the Donatists to be valid; so that both sides were agreed, that the baptism of the Donatists was good; therefore the safest way for St. Austin, and other Catholics, according to this argument, was to be baptized again by the Donatists; because, by the acknowledgment of both sides, baptism among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the church of Rome: Several in that church hold the personal infallibility of the Pope, and the lawfulness of deposing and killing kings for heresy, to be *de fide*; that is, necessary articles of faith; and, consequently, that whoever does not believe them cannot be saved. But a great many Papists, though they believe these things to be no matters of faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this argument, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points: because both sides are agreed, that they that hold them may be saved; but one side positively says, that men cannot be saved if they do not hold them.

But my text furnishes me with as good an instance to this purpose as can be desired. St. Paul, here in the text, acknowledgeth the possibility of the salvation of those who built hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity; that they might be saved, though with great difficulty, and as it were out of the fire. But now, among those builders with hay and stubble, there were those who denied the possibility of St. Paul's salvation, and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who built the Jewish ceremonies and observances upon the foundation of Christianity; and said, that unless men were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. So that, by this argument, St. Paul, and his followers, ought to have gone over to those Judaizing Christians; because it was acknowledged on both sides, that they might be saved. But these Judaizing Christians were as uncharitable to St. Paul, and other Christians, as the church of Rome is now to us; for they

they said positively, that they could not be saved. But can any man think, that St. Paul would have been moved, by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation, for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument you see is the very same; and yet it concludes the wrong way: which plainly shews, that it is a contingent argument, and concludes uncertainly, and by chance; and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

3. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it. I shall mention but these two.

1<sup>st</sup>, According to this principle, it is always safest to be on the uncharitable side: and yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true church, as a man would wish. Charity is one of the most essential marks of Christianity; and what the Apostle saith of particular Christians, is as true of whole churches, *that though they have all faith, yet if they have not charity, they are nothing.*

I grant that no charity teacheth men to see others damned, and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be considered, that the damning of men is a very hard thing; and therefore whenever we do it, the case must be wonderfully plain. And is it so in this matter? They of the church of Rome cannot deny, but that we embrace all the doctrines of our Saviour contained in the Apostles creed, and determined by the four first general councils; and yet they will not allow this, and a good life, to put us within a possibility of salvation, because we will not submit to all the innovations they would impose upon us. And yet I think there is scarce any doctrine or practice in difference between them and us, which some or other of their most learned writers have not acknowledged, either not to be sufficiently contained in scripture, or not to have been held and practised by the primitive church: so that nothing can excuse their uncharitableness towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this argument; for they do not what in them lies to make themselves no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer and more Christian church: A medium which we do not desire to make use of.

2<sup>dly</sup>, If

2dly, If this argument were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but confidence and uncharitableness to do this. But is there any sense, that another man's boldness, and want of charity, should be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful physician and a mountebank. A learned and skilful physician is modest, and speaks justly of things: he says, that such a method of cure which he hath directed is safe; and withal, that that which the mountebank prescribes, may possibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it. But the mountebank, who never talks of any thing less than infallible cures, and always the more mountebank, the stronger pretence to infallibility; he is positive, that that method which the physician prescribes, will destroy the patient; but his receipt is infallible, and never fails. Is there any reason in this case, that this man should carry it merely by his confidence? And yet, if this argument be good, the safest way is, to reject the physician's advice, and to stick to the mountebank's: for both sides are agreed, that there is a possibility of a cure in the mountebank's method, but not in the physician's. And so the whole force of the argument lies in the confidence of an ignorant man.

4. This argument is very unfit to work upon those to whom it is propounded. For either they believe we say true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reason to be moved by what we say. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we say in this matter; namely, that though it be possible for some in the communion of the Roman church to be saved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a safe condition already in our church? And why then should a bare possibility, accompanied with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

5. Lastly, This argument is very improper to be urged by those who make use of it. Half of the strength  
of

of it lies in this, that we Protestants acknowledge, that it is possible a Papist may be saved. But why should they lay any stress upon this? What matter is it what we heretics say, who are so damnably mistaken in all other things? Methinks, if there were no other reason, yet because we say it, it should seem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive, when it serves for their purpose, we have some little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in some measure satisfied of the weakness of this argument; which is so transparent, that no wise man can honestly use it, and he must have a very odd understanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a casual and contingent argument; and sometimes it concludes right, and oftener wrong: and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one case, when all things are so equal on both sides, that there is nothing else in the whole world to determine him; which surely can never happen in matters of religion necessary to be believed. No man is so weak, as not to consider, in the change of his religion, the merits of the cause itself; as not to examine the doctrines and practices of the churches on both sides; as not to take notice of the confidence and charity of both parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conscientious and a prudent man. And if, upon enquiry, there appear to be a clear advantage on either side, then this argument is needless, and comes too late; because the work is already done without it.

Besides that the great hazard of salvation in the Roman church, which we declare upon account of the doctrines and practices which I have mentioned, ought to deter any man much more from that religion, than the acknowledged possibility of salvation in it ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it. Never did any Christian church build so much hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity; and therefore those that are saved in it, must be saved, as it were, out of the fire. And though purgatory be not meant in the text, yet it is a doctrine very well suited to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a fire to try their work what it is, and to burn up their hay and stubble.



ble. And I have so much charity, and I desire always to have it, as to hope, that a great many among them, who lived piously, and have been almost inevitably detained in that church, by the prejudice of education, and an invincible ignorance, will, upon a general repentance, find mercy with God: and tho' their works suffer loss, and be burnt; yet they themselves may escape, as out of the fire. But as for those who had the opportunities of coming to the knowledge of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that church, or apostatise from the truth, I think their condition so far from being safe, that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case, to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the two things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the necessary defence of our religion, against the restless importunities and attempts of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons; hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses, that I have constantly made it my business, in this great presence and assembly, to plead against the impieties and wickedness of men; and have endeavoured, by the best arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a firm belief and serious practice of the main things of religion. And I do assure you, I had much rather persuade any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever; for I doubt not, but the belief of the ancient creed, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, together with a good life, will certainly save a man; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no not in an infallible church, if there were any such to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the genius and humour of the several sects and professions in religion; and, upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe the church of England to be the best constituted church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the doctrine, and government, and worship of it, are excellently framed to make men soberly religious; securing men, on the one hand, from the wild freaks of enthusiasm; and, on the other,

from the gross follies of superstition. And our church hath this peculiar advantage above several professions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the civil authority, and hath always been untainted in its loyalty.

And now, shall every trifling consideration be sufficient to move a man to relinquish such a church? There is no greater disparagement to a man's understanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than rashly to change one's religion. Religion is our greatest concernment of all other; and it is not every little argument, no, nor a great noise about infallibility, nothing but very plain and convincing evidence, that should sway a man in this case. But they are utterly inexcusable who make a change of such concernment upon the insinuations of one side only, without ever hearing what can be said for the church they were baptized and brought up in before they leave it. They that can yield thus easily to the impressions of every one that hath a design and interest to make profelytes, may, at this rate of discretion, change their religion twice a day; and, instead of morning and evening prayer, they may have a morning and evening religion. Therefore, for God's sake, and for our own souls sake, and for the sake of our reputation, let us consider, and *shew ourselves men*. Let us not suffer ourselves to be shaken and carried away by every wind. Let us not run ourselves into danger when we may be safe. Let us stick to the foundation of religion, the articles of our common belief, and build upon them gold, and silver, and precious stones; I mean, the virtues and actions of a good life: and if we would do this, we should not be apt to set such a value upon hay and stubble. If we would sincerely endeavour to live holy and virtuous lives, we should not need to cast about for a religion which may furnish us with easy and indirect ways to get to heaven.

I will conclude all with the Apostle's exhortation: *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

*Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep,*  
by

Ser. 12. *Of the inward peace and pleasure, &c.* 207  
by the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect  
in every good work to do his will, working in you that  
which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ;  
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## S E R M O N XII.

Of the inward peace and pleasure which at-  
tends religion.

P S A L M, cxix. 165.

*Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing  
shall offend them.*

**I**N these words there are two things contained; the de-  
scription of a good man, and the reward of his good-  
ness.

1. The description of a good man: He is said to be  
one that *loves the law* of God; that is, that loves to me-  
ditate upon it, and to practise it.

2. The reward of his goodness: *Great peace have  
they that love thy law.* The word *peace* is many times  
used in scripture in a very large sense, so as to compre-  
hend all kind of happiness. Sometimes it signifies out-  
ward peace and quiet, in opposition to war and conten-  
tion; and sometimes inward peace and contentment, in  
opposition to inward trouble and anguish. I understand  
the text chiefly in this last sense, not wholly excluding  
either of the other.

My design at present from these words is, to recom-  
mend religion to men, from the consideration of that in-  
ward peace and pleasure which attends it. And surely  
nothing can be said more to the advantage of religion,  
in the opinion of considerate men, than this. For the  
aim of all philosophy, and the great search of wise men,  
hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind.

And if religion be able to give this, a greater commendation need not be given to religion.

But before I enter upon this argument, I shall premise two things by way of caution.

1. That these kind of observations are not to be taken too strictly and rigorously, as if they never failed in any one instance. Aristotle observed long since, that moral and proverbial sayings are understood to be true generally and for the most part; and that is all the truth that is to be expected in them. As, when Solomon says, *Train up a child in the way wherein he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it*; this is not to be so taken, as if no child that is piously educated did ever miscarry afterwards; but that the good education of children is the best way to make good men, and commonly approved to be so by experience. So here, when it is said, that *great peace have they that love God's law*; the meaning is, that religion hath generally this effect, though in some cases, and as to some persons, it may be accidentally hindered.

2. When I say that religion gives peace and tranquillity to our minds, this is chiefly to be understood of a religious state in which a man is well settled and confirmed, and not of our first entrance into it; for that is more or less troublesome according as we make it. If we begin a religious course betimes, before we have contracted any great guilt, and before the habits of sin be grown strong in us, the work goes on easily, without any great conflict or resistance. But the case is otherwise, when a man breaks off from a wicked life, and becomes religious, from the direct contrary course in which he hath been long and deeply engaged. In this case no man is so unreasonable as to deny, that there is a great deal of sensible trouble and difficulty in the making of this change; but when it is once made, peace and comfort will spring up by degrees, and daily increase, as we grow more confirmed and established in a good course.

These two things being premised, I shall now endeavour to shew, that religion gives a man the greatest pleasure and satisfaction of mind; and that there is no true peace, nor any comparable pleasure to be had in a contrary course: and that from these two heads; from  
testimony

testimony of scripture; and from the nature of religion, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind.

*First*, From testimony of scripture. I shall select some of those texts which are more full and express to this purpose. Job xxii. 21. speaking of God, *Acquaint thyself now with him, and be at peace. To acquaint ourselves with God*, is a phrase of the same importance with *coming to God*, and *seeking of him*, and many other like expressions in scripture, which signify nothing else, but to become religious. Psal. xxxvii. 37. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.* Or, as these words are rendered according to the LXX. in our old translation, *Keep innocency, take heed to the thing that is right: for that shall bring thee peace at the last.* Prov. iii. 17. where Solomon, speaking of wisdom, which with him is but another name for religion, says, *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* II. xxxii. 17. *The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.* Matth. xi. 28. 29. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Now, *to come to Christ*, is to become his disciples; to believe and practise his doctrine; for so our Saviour explains himself in the next words: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; and ye shall find rest for your souls.* Rom. ii. 10. *Glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good.*

And, on the contrary, the scripture represents the condition of a sinner to be full of trouble and disquiet. David, tho' he was a very good man, yet when he had grievously offended God, the anguish of his mind was such, as even to disorder and distemper his body: Psal. xxxviii. 2. 3. 4. *Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. For there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger: neither is there rest in my bones, because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: and as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.* II. lvii. 20. 21. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* And II. lix. 7. 8. *Misery and destruction are in their paths; and the way of peace they know not: they have made*

*themselves crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein, shall not know peace. Rom. ii. 9. Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.*

You see how full and express the scripture is in this matter. I come now in the

*Second place*, to give you a more particular account of this from the nature of religion, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind. And that I shall do in these three particulars.

1. Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet.

2. It furnishes us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

3. The reflection upon a religious course of life, and all the actions of it, doth afterwards yield great pleasure and satisfaction.

I. Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet. The chief causes of inward trouble and discontent are these two: doubting, and anxiety of mind; and guilt of conscience. Now, religion is apt to free us from both these.

1. From doubting and anxiety of mind. Irreligion and Atheism makes a man full of doubts and jealousies, whether he be in the right, and whether at last things will not prove quite otherwise than he hath rashly determined. For tho' a man endeavour never so much to settle himself in the principles of infidelity, and to persuade his mind that there is no God, and consequently that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor punishments to be feared in another life; yet he can never attain to a steady and unshaken persuasion of these things. And however he may please himself with witty reasons against the common belief of mankind, and smart repartees to their arguments, and bold and pleasant raillery about these matters; yet I dare say, no man ever sat down in a clear and full satisfaction concerning them. For when he hath done all that he can to reason himself out of religion, his conscience ever and anon recoils upon him; and his natural thoughts and apprehensions rise up against his reasonings, and all his wit and subtilty is confuted and born down by a secret and strong suspicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind, that things may be otherwise.

And

And the reason hereof is plain; because all this is an endeavour against nature, and those vigorous instincts which God hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary. For whenever our minds are free, and not violently hurried away by passion, nor blinded by prejudice, they do of themselves return to their first and most natural apprehension of things. And this is the reason why, when the Atheist falls into any great calamity, and is awakened to an impartial consideration of things by the apprehension of death and judgment, and despairs of enjoying any longer those pleasures for the sake of which he hath all this while rebelled against religion, his courage presently sinks, and all his arguments fail him, and his case is now too serious to admit of jesting, and at the bottom of his soul he doubts of all that which he asserted with so much confidence, and set so good a face upon before; and can find no ease to his mind, but in retreating from his former principles; nor no hopes of consolation for himself, but in acknowledging that God whom he hath denied, and imploring his mercy whom he hath affronted.

This is always the case of these persons when they come to extremity; not to mention the infinite checks and rebukes which their own minds give them upon other occasions: so that it is very seldom that these men have any tolerable enjoyment of themselves, but are forced to run away from themselves into company, and to stupefy themselves by intemperance, that they may not feel the fearful twitches and gripings of their own minds.

Whereas he who entertains the principles of religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehensions, and the general voice of mankind, and is not conscious to himself that he knowingly and wilfully lives contrary to these principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about these things; being verily persuaded they are true, and that he hath all the reason in the world to think so: and if they should prove otherwise, which he hath no other cause to suspect; yet he hath this satisfaction, that he hath taken the wisest course, and hath consulted his own present peace and future security infinitely better than the Atheist hath done, in case he should prove to be mistaken. For it is a fatal mistake, to think there is no God, if there be



one: but a mistake on the other hand hath no future bad consequences depending upon it, nor indeed any great present inconvenience; religion only restraining a man from doing some things, from most of which it is good he should be restrained however. So that at the worst the religious man is only mistaken; but the Atheist is miserable if he be mistaken; miserable beyond all imagination, and past all remedy.

2. Another, and indeed a principal cause of trouble and discontent to the minds of men, is guilt. Now, guilt is a consciousness to ourselves that we have done amiss; and the very thought that we have done amiss, is apt to lie very cross in our minds, and to cause great anguish and confusion. Besides that guilt is always attended with fear; which naturally springs up in the mind of man, from a secret apprehension of the mischief and inconvenience that his sin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance that hangs over him from God, and will overtake him either in this world, or in the other.

And though the sinner, while he is in full health and prosperity, may make a shift to divert and shake off these fears; yet they frequently return upon him, and upon every little noise of danger, upon the apprehension of any calamity that comes near him, his guilty mind is presently jealous that it is making towards him, and is particularly levelled against him. For he is sensible that there is a just power above him, to whose indignation he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear of him; and how long soever he may have escaped punishment in this world, he cannot but dread the vengeance of the other: and these thoughts are a continual disturbance to his mind, and *in the midst of laughter make his heart heavy*; and the longer he continues in a wicked course, the more he multiplies the grounds and causes of his fears.

But now religion frees a man from all this torment, either by preventing the cause of it, or directing to the cure; either by preserving us from guilt, or clearing us of it in case we have contracted it. It preserves us from guilt, by keeping us innocent; and in case we have offended, it clears us of it, by leading us to repentance, and the amendment of our lives; which is the only way  
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to recover the favour of God, and the peace of our own consciences, and to secure us against all apprehension of danger from the divine justice; though not absolutely from all fear of punishment in this world, yet from that which is the greatest danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means a man's mind is settled in perfect peace, religion freeing him from those tormenting fears of the divine displeasure, which he can upon no other terms rid himself of; whereas the sinner is always sowing the seeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying a foundation of continual discontent to himself.

II. As religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and disquiet, so it ministers to us all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind. Whoever lives according to the rules of religion, lays these three great foundations of peace and comfort to himself.

1. He is satisfied, that in being religious he doth that which is most reasonable.

2. That he secures himself against the greatest mischiefs and dangers, by making God his friend.

3. That, upon the whole matter, he does in all respects most effectually consult and promote his own interest and happiness.

1. He is satisfied that he does that which is most reasonable. And it is no small pleasure to be justified to ourselves; to be satisfied that we are what we ought to be, and do what in reason we ought to do; that which best becomes us, and which, according to the primitive intention of our being, is most natural; for whatever is natural is pleasant. Now, the practice of piety towards God, and of every other grace and virtue which religion teaches us, are things reasonable in themselves, and what God, when he made us, intended we should do. And a man is then pleased with himself, and his own actions, when he doth what he is convinced he ought to do; and is then offended with himself, when he goes against the light of his own mind, by neglecting his duty, or doing contrary to it: for then his conscience checks him; and there is something within him that is uneasy, and puts him into disorder; as when a man eats or drinks any thing that is unwholesome, it offends his stomach,

stomach, and puts his body into an unnatural and a restless state.

For every thing is then at rest and peace, when it is in that state in which nature intended it to be; and, being violently forced out of it, it is never quiet till it recover again. Now, religion, and the practice of its virtues, is the natural state of the soul, the condition to which God designed it. As God made man a reasonable creature, so all the acts of religion are reasonable, and suitable to our nature; and our souls are then in health, when we are what the laws of religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an inexpressible ease and pleasure when our body is in its perfect state of health, and on the contrary every distemper causeth pain and uneasiness; so is it with the soul. When religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds, and the course of our lives, is conformable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when we are otherwise, and live in any vicious practice, how can there be peace, so long as we act unreasonably, and do those things whereby we necessarily create trouble and disturbance to ourselves? How can we hope to be at ease so long as we are in a sick and diseased condition? Till the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our spirits will be in a perpetual tumult and fermentation; and it is as impossible for us to enjoy the peace and serenity of our minds, as it is for a sick man to be at ease. The man may use what arts of diversion he will, and change from one place and posture to another; but still he is restless, because there is that within him which gives him pain and disturbance. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* Such men may dissemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleasantness and contentment; but God, who sees all the secrets of mens hearts, knows it is far otherwise with them: *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

2. Another ground of peace which the religious man hath, is, that he hath made God his friend. Now, friendship is peace and pleasure both. It is mutual love, and that is a double pleasure: and it is hard to say which is the greatest, the pleasure of loving God, or of knowing that he loves us. Now, whoever sincerely endeavours to  
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please God, may rest perfectly assured that God hath no displeasure against him : for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance shall behold the upright* ; that is, he will be favourable to such persons. As *he hates the workers of iniquity, so he takes pleasure in them that fear him, in such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.*

And, being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears ; and may say with David, *Return thou unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* What can reasonably trouble or discontent that man who hath made his peace with God, and is restored to his favour, who is the best and most powerful friend, and can be the worst and most dangerous enemy in the whole world?

3. By being religious we do most effectually consult our own interest and happiness. A great part of religion consists in moderating our appetites and passions ; and this naturally tends to the composure of our minds. He that lives piously and virtuously, acts according to reason ; and in doing so maintains the present peace of his own mind ; and not only so, but he lays the foundation of his future happiness to all eternity. For religion gives a man the hopes of eternal life ; and all pleasure does not consist in present enjoyment : there is a mighty pleasure also in the firm belief and expectation of a future good ; and, if it be a great and lasting good, it will support a man under a great many present evils. If religion be certainly the way to avoid the greatest evils, and to bring us to happiness at last, we may contentedly bear a great many afflictions for its sake : for though all suffering be grievous, yet it is pleasant to escape great dangers, and to come to the possession of a mighty good, though it be with great difficulty and inconvenience to ourselves. And when we come to heaven, if ever we be so happy as to get thither, it will be a new and greater pleasure to us to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were saved, and made happy.

So that all these put together are a firm foundation of  
peace

peace and comfort to a good man. There is a great satisfaction in the very doing of our duty, and acting reasonably, though there may happen to be some present trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we do not only satisfy ourselves in so doing, but likewise please him whose favour is better than life, and whose frowns are more terrible than death; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happiness, and in serving God do most effectually serve our own interest; what can be imagined to minister more peace and pleasure to the mind of man?

This is the second thing. Religion furnishes us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

III. The reflexion upon a religious and virtuous course of life, doth afterwards yield a mighty pleasure and satisfaction. And what can commend religion more to us, than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives so much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty and reluctancy we may find in the doing of it, to be sure there is peace and satisfaction in the looking back upon it. No man ever reflected upon himself with regret for having done his duty to God or man; for having lived soberly, or righteously, or godly in this present world. Nay, on the contrary, the conscience of any duty faithfully discharged, the memory of any good we have done, does refresh the soul with a strange kind of pleasure and joy: *Our rejoicing is this, (saith St. Paul) the testimony of our consciences, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*

But, on the other side, the course of a vitious life; all acts of impiety to God, of malice and injustice to men, of intemperance and excess in reference to ourselves, do certainly leave a sting behind them. And whatever pleasure there may be in the present act of them, the memory of them is so tormenting, that men are glad to use all the arts of diversion to fence off the thoughts of them. One of the greatest troubles in the world to a bad man, is to look into himself, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the consciences of men whether this be not true.

And is not here now a mighty difference between these two courses of life; that when we do any thing  
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that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is soon over, but the pleasure of it is perpetual; when we do a wicked action, the pleasure of it is short and transient, but the trouble and sting of it remains for ever? The reflexion upon the good we have done, gives a lasting satisfaction to our minds; but the remembrance of any evil committed by us, leaves a perpetual discontent.

And, which is yet more considerable, a religious and virtuous course of life does then yield most peace and comfort, when we most stand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conscience. This makes all calm and serene within, when there is nothing but clouds and darkness about him. So David observes of the good man, Psal. cxii. 4. *Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness.* All the pious and virtuous actions that we do, are so many seeds of peace and comfort, sown in our consciences, which will spring up and flourish most in times of outward trouble and distress: *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.* And at the hour of death: *The righteous hath hope in his death,* saith Solomon. And what a seasonable refreshment is it to the mind of man, when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is just stepping into the other world, to be able to look back with satisfaction upon a religious and well-spent life? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man do overflow, and a kind of heaven springs up in his mind, and he rejoiceth in the hopes of the glory of God. And that is a true and solid comfort indeed, which will stand by us in the day of adversity, and stick close to us when we have most need of it.

*But with the ungodly it is not so.* His guilt lies in wait for him, especially against such times; and is never more fierce and raging than in the day of distress: so that according as his troubles without are multiplied, so are his stings within. And surely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneasy mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might be tolerable: *The spirit of man might bear his infirmities; but*  
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*a wounded spirit who can bear?* But, especially at the hour of death, how does the guilt of his wicked life then stare him in the face? what storms and tempests are raised in his soul, which make it like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest? When eternity, that fearful and amazing sight, presents itself to his mind, and he feels himself sinking into the regions of darkness, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the just reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the sins of his life? and how full of rage and indignation is he against himself for having neglected to know, what he had so many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belong to his peace; and which, because he hath neglected them, are now, and likely to be for ever hid from his eyes?

And if this be the true case of the righteous and wicked man, I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any man's thoughts, in which of these conditions he would be. And surely the difference between them is so very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now, though this discourse be very true, yet, for the full clearing of this matter, it will be but fair to consider what may be said on the other side; and the rather because there are several objections which seem to be countenanced from experience; which is enough to overthrow the most plausible speculation. As,

1. That wicked men seem to have a great deal of pleasure and contentment in their vices.

2. That religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of.

3. That those who are religious, are many times very disconsolate, and full of trouble.

To the first, I deny not that wicked men have some pleasure in their vices; but when all things are rightly computed, and just abatements made, it will amount to very little. For it is the lowest and meanest kind of pleasure; it is chiefly the pleasure of our bodies and our senses, of our worse part; the pleasure of the beast, and not of the man; that which least becomes us, and which were least of all made for. Those sensual pleasures which are lawful, are much inferior to the least satisfaction



the mind; and when they are unlawful, they are always inconsistent with it. And *what is a man profited*, if, to gain a little sensual pleasure, he lose the peace of his soul? Can we find in our hearts to call that pleasure which robs us of a far greater and higher satisfaction than it brings? The delights of sense are so far from being the chief pleasure which God designed us, that, on the contrary, he intended we should take our chief pleasure in the restraining and moderating of our sensual appetites and desires, and in keeping them within the bounds of reason and religion.

And then, it is not a lasting pleasure. Those fits of mirth which wicked men have, how soon are they over? like a sudden blaze, which, after a little flash and noise, is presently gone. It is the comparison of a very great and experienced man in these matters: *Like the crackling of thorns under a pot*, (saith Solomon) *so is the laughter of the fool*; that is, the mirth of the wicked man; it may be loud, but it lasts not.

But, which is most considerable of all, the pleasures of sin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miseries and inconveniencies which they draw after them; many times poverty and reproach, pains and diseases upon our bodies; *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil*. So that if these pleasures were greater than they are, a man had better be without them than purchase them at such dear rates.

To the second, That religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of; as, the bearing of persecution, repentance and mortification, fasting and abstinence, and many other rigours and severities. As to persecution, this discourse doth not pretend that religion exempts men from outward troubles; but that, when they happen, it supports men under them better than any thing else. As for repentance and mortification; this chiefly concerns our first entrance into religion after a wicked life, which I acknowledged in the beginning of this discourse to be very grievous: but this doth not hinder, but that though religion may be troublesome at first to some persons, whose former sins and crimes have made

it so, it may be pleasant afterwards when we are accustomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unless we resolve to be miserable; for *except we repent, we must perish*. Now, there is always a rational satisfaction in submitting to a less inconvenience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for fasting and abstinence, which is many times very helpful and subservient to the ends of religion; there is no such extraordinary trouble in it, if it be discreetly managed, as is worth the speaking of. And as for other rigours and severities which some pretend religion does impose; I have only this to say, that if men will play the fool, and make religion more troublesome than God hath made it, I cannot help that; and that this is a false representation of religion which some in the world have made, as if it did chiefly consist, not in pleasing God, but in displeasing and tormenting ourselves. This is not to paint Religion like herself, but rather like one of the furies, with nothing but whips and snakes about her.

To the third, That those who are religious, are many times very disconsolate, and full of trouble; This, I confess, is a great objection indeed, if religion were the cause of this trouble. But there are other plain causes of it, to which religion rightly understood is not accessary; as, false and mistaken principles in religion; the imperfection of our religion, and obedience to God; and a melancholy temper and disposition. False and mistaken principles in religion; as this for one, That God does not sincerely desire the salvation of men, but hath from all eternity effectually barred the greatest part of mankind from all possibility of attaining that happiness which he offers to them; and every one hath cause to fear that he may be in that number. This were a melancholy consideration indeed, if it were true; but there is no ground either from reason or scripture to entertain any such thought of God. Our destruction is of ourselves; and no man shall be ruined by any decree of God, who does not ruin himself by his own fault.

Or else, the imperfection of our religion, and obedience to God. Some perhaps are very devout in serving God, but not so kind and charitable, so just and honest in their dealings with men. No wonder if such persons  
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be disquieted; the natural consciences of men being not more apt to disquiet them for any thing, than for the neglect of those moral duties which natural light teacheth them. Peace of conscience is the effect of an impartial and universal obedience to the laws of God; and I hope no man will blame religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of religion.

Or, lastly, a melancholy temper and disposition; which is not from religion, but from our nature and constitution: and therefore religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and plainly as I could, to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, religion rightly understood and sincerely practised is apt to bring to the minds of men. And I do not know by what sort of argument religion can be more effectually recommended to wise and considerate men. For, in persuading men to be religious, I do not go about to rob them of any true pleasure and contentment, but to direct them to the very best, nay the only way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in great pity and compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but do grievously mistake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have set before you; a holy and virtuous life; *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world. A good man* (saith Solomon) *is satisfied from himself*: He hath the pleasure of being wise, and acting reasonably; the pleasure of being justified to himself in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the sentence of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent; because that prevents guilt and trouble. It is pleasant to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others; and it is pleasant to grow better, because that is to excel ourselves: nay it is pleasant even to mortify and subdue our lusts, because that is victory. It is pleasant to command our appetites and passions, and to keep them in due order, within the bounds of reason and religion; because this is a kind of empire, this is to govern. It is naturally pleasant to rule and have power over others; but he is the great and the absolute prince, who commands himself. This is *the kingdom of God within us*; a dominion infi-

nitely to be preferred before all *the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them.* It is the *kingdom of God* described by the Apostle, which consists in *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* In a word, the pleasure of being good, and of doing good, is the chief happiness of God himself.

But now, the wicked man deprives himself of all this pleasure, and creates perpetual discontent to his own mind. O the torments of a guilty conscience, which the sinner feels more or less all his life long! But, alas! thou dost not yet know the worst of it, no not in this world. What wilt thou do when thou comest to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thyself; or what comfort can any one else give thee, when thy conscience is miserably rent and torn by those waking furies which will then rage in thy breast, and thou knowest not which way to turn thyself for ease? Then, perhaps, at last the priest is unwillingly sent for, to patch up thy conscience as well as he can, and to appease the cries of it; and to force himself, out of very pity and good nature, to say, *Peace, peace, when there is no peace.* But, alas! man, what can we do? what comfort can we give thee, when thy iniquities testify against thee to thy very face? *How can there be peace,* when thy lusts and debaucheries, thy impieties to God, and thy injuries to men, have been so many? *How can there be peace,* when thy whole life hath been a continued contempt and provocation of almighty God, and a perpetual violence and affront to the light and reason of thy own mind?

Therefore whatever temptation there may be in sin at a distance, whatever pleasure in the act and commission of it; yet remember, that it always goes off with trouble, and *will be bitterness in the end.* Those words of Solomon have a terrible sting in the conclusion of them, *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

This one thought, which will very often unavoidably break into our minds, that *God will bring us into judgment,* is enough to dash all our contentment, and to spoil all the pleasure of a sinful life. Never expect to be quiet  
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in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thyself, till thou livest a virtuous and religious life.

And if this discourse be true, as I am confident I have every man's conscience on my side; I say, if this be true, let us venture to be wise and happy; that is, to be religious. Let us resolve to *break off our sins by repentance; to fear God, and keep his commandments*, as ever we desire to avoid the unspeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneasy to ourselves.

Grant, we beseech thee, almighty God, that we may every one of us *know and do in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes. And the God of peace, which brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## S E R M O N XIII.

The nature and benefit of consideration.

P S A L. cxix. 59.

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

**T**H E two great causes of the ruin of men are, infidelity, and want of consideration. Some do not believe the principles of religion; or at least have, by arguing against them, rendered them so doubtful to themselves, as to take away the force and efficacy of them. But these are but a very small part of mankind, in comparison of those who perish for want of considering these things: for most men take the principles of religion for granted, That there is a God and a providence, and a state of rewards and punishments after this life; and never

never entertained any considerable doubt in their minds to the contrary; but for all this, they never attended to the proper and natural consequences of those principles, nor applied them to their own case; they never seriously considered the notorious inconsistency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of persons they ought to be, who are verily persuaded of the truth of these things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a God, and considers the necessary and immediate consequences of such a persuasion, can think it safe to affront him by a wicked life. No man that believes the infinite happiness and misery of another world, and considers withal that one of these shall certainly be his portion according as he demean's himself in this present life, can think it indifferent what course he takes. Men may thrust away these thoughts, and keep them out of their minds for a long time; but no man that enters into the serious consideration of these matters, can possibly think it a thing indifferent to him, whether he be happy or miserable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of mens lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart: would they but seriously consider the consequences of a wicked life, they would see so plain reason, and so urgent a necessity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This course David took here in the text, and he found the happy success of it: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

In which words there are these two things considerable.

1. The course which David here took for the reforming of his life: *I thought on my ways.*

2. The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

These are the two heads of my following discourse; which, when I have spoken to, I shall endeavour to persuade myself and you to take the same course which David

vid here did; and God grant that I may have the same effect.

*First*, We will consider the course which David here took for the reforming of his life: *I thought on my ways*; or, as the words are rendered in our old translation, *I called my own ways to remembrance*. And this may either signify a general survey and examination of his life, respecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it; or else, which is more probable, it may specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of his life: *I thought on my ways*; that is, I called my sins to remembrance. Neither of these senses can be much amiss, in order to the effect mentioned in the text, the reformation and amendment of our lives: and therefore neither of them can reasonably be excluded, though I shall principally insist upon the latter.

I. This *thinking on our ways* may signify a general survey and examination of our lives, respecting indifferently our good and bad actions: for *way* is a metaphorical word, denoting the course of a man's life and actions. *I thought on my ways*; that is, I examined my life, and called myself to a strict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the law of God, the rule and measure of my duty, and considered how far I had obeyed that law, or offended against it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in comparison of what I might and ought to have done: that by this means I might come to understand the true state and condition of my soul; and discerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiss, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it must needs be a thing of excellent use, for men to set apart some particular times for the examination of themselves, that they may know how accounts stand between God and them. Pythagoras, or whoever was the author of these golden verses which pass under his name, doth especially recommend this practice to his scholars, Every night before they slept, to call themselves to account for the actions of the day past; inquiring wherein they had transgressed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this, no doubt, is an admirable



mirable means to improve men in virtue, a most effectual way to keep our consciences continually waking and tender, and to make us stand in awe of ourselves, and afraid to sin, when we know before hand that we must give so severe an account to ourselves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wisdom, to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in some measure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives; and that we may not be oppressed and confounded by the insupportable weight of the sins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worst time, when we are sick and weak, and have neither understanding nor leisure to recollect ourselves, and to call our sins distinctly to remembrance, much less to exercise any fit and proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in religion, when our reason is once departed from us: then darkness hath overtaken us indeed, and *the night is come, when no man can work*. But though we were never so sensible, and should do all we can at that time; yet, after all this, how it will go with us, God alone knows. I am sure it is too much presumption for any man to be confident, that one general and confused act of repentance will serve his turn for the sins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reason why we should often examine ourselves, both in order to the amendment of our lives; and the ease of our consciences when we come to die.

II. This *thinking of our ways* may particularly and specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of our lives: *I thought on my ways*; that is, I called my sins to remembrance: I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them seriously to heart: I considered all the circumstances and consequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reasoning the matter thoroughly with myself, came to a peremptory and fixed resolution of breaking off this wicked course of life, and betaking myself to the obedience of Gods laws. And the *consideration of our ways* taken in this sense, which seems to be the more probable meaning of the words, may reasonably imply it in these following particulars.

1. The taking a particular account of our sins, together

gether with the several circumstances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for them: *I thought on my ways*; that is, I laid them sadly to heart.

3. A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the necessity of quitting this course.

6. An apprehension of the possibility of doing this.

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins, together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them. And to this end we may do well to reflect particularly upon the several stages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at least the principal miscarriages belonging to each of them. And, the better to enable us hereto, it will be useful to have before our eyes some abridgment or summary of the laws of God, containing the chief heads of our duties and sins, of virtues and vices; for this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherways perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We should likewise consider the several relations wherein we have stood to others, and how far we have transgressed or failed of our duty in any of these respects.

And having thus far made up our sad account, we may in a great measure understand the number and greatness of our sins; abating for some particulars which are slipt out of our memory, and for sins of ignorance, and daily infirmities, which are innumerable. By all which we may see what vile wretches, and grievous offenders we have been; especially if we take into consideration the several heavy circumstances of our sins, which do above measure aggravate them; the heinousness of many of them as to their nature, and the injurious consequences of them to the person, or estate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed against the clear knowledge of our duty; against the frequent checks and convictions of our consciences, telling us, when we did them, that we did amiss; against so many motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, so many admonitions  
and

and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own most serious vows and resolutions, renewed at several times, especially upon receiving of the blessed Sacrament, and in times of sickness and distress: and all this notwithstanding the plainest declarations of God's will to the contrary; notwithstanding the terrors of the Lord, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; notwithstanding the cruel sufferings of the Son of God for our sins, and the most merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood. Add to this, the scandal of our wicked lives to our holy religion; the ill example of them to the corruption and debauching of others; the affront of them to the divine authority; and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy, and goodness, and patience of God, to which we have such infinite obligations. Thus we should set our sins in order before our eyes, with the several aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for sin: *I thought on my ways*; that is, I laid my sins sadly to heart. And surely when ever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and sensibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and smite upon our breasts, and be in pain and heaviness at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are very different, and therefore I do not say, that tears are absolutely necessary to repentance; but they do very well become it: and a thorough sense of sin will almost melt the most hard and obdurate disposition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be sure, the consideration of our ways should cause inward trouble, and confusion in our minds. The least we can do, when we have done amiss, is to be sorry for it; to condemn our own folly; and to be full of indignation and displeasure against ourselves for what we have done; and to resolve never to do the like again. And let us make sure that our trouble and sorrow for sin have this effect, to make us leave our sins; and then we shall need to be the less solicitous about the degrees and outward expressions of it.

3. A serious consideration of the evil, and unreasonableness of a sinful course: That sin is the stain and blemish

blemish of our natures, the reproach of our reason and understanding, the disease and deformity of our souls, the great enemy of our peace, the cause of all our fears and troubles; that whenever we do a wicked action, we go contrary to the clearest dictates of our reason and conscience, to our plain and true interest, and to the strongest ties and obligations of duty and gratitude. And, which renders it yet more unreasonable, sin is a voluntary evil, which men wilfully bring upon themselves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or no: a man may be poor or sick by misfortune; but no man is wicked and vicious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakness, by suffering ourselves to be hurried away by every foolish lust and passion; to do things which we know to be prejudicial and hurtful to ourselves, and so base and unworthy in themselves, that we are ashamed to do them, not only in the presence of a wise man, but even of a child or a fool? So that if sin were followed with no other punishment besides the guilt of having done a shameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himself a fool and a beast: one would not be false and unjust, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reason, yet out of mere greatness and generosity of mind, out of respect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reason and understanding. For let witty men say what they will in defence of their vices, there are so many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreasonableness of sin, that the matter is past all denial. Men are generally galled and uneasy at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it. They are ashamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided with it. And it is very observable, that tho' the greater part of the world always was bad, and vice hath ever had more servants and followers to cry it up; yet never was there any age so degenerate, in which vice could get the better of virtue in point of general esteem and reputation. Even they whose wills have been most enslaved to sin, could never yet so far bribe and corrupt their understandings, as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life. And these are so sad and dreadful, and the danger of them so evident, and so perpetually threatening us, that no temptation can be sufficient to excuse a man to himself, and his own reason, for venturing upon them. A principal point of wisdom is, to look to the end of things; not only to consider the present pleasure and advantage of any thing, but also the ill consequences of it for the future, and to balance them one against the other.

Now, sin in its own nature tends to make men miserable. It certainly causes trouble and disquiet of mind: and to a considerate man, that knows how to value the ease and satisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument against sin, than to consider, that the forsaking of it is the only way to find rest to our souls.

Besides this, every vice is naturally attended with some particular mischief and inconvenience; which makes it even in this life a punishment to itself: and commonly the providence of God, and his just judgment upon sinners, strikes in to heighten the mischievous consequences of a sinful course. This we have represented in the parable of the prodigal. His riotous course of life did naturally, and of itself, bring him to want; but the providence of God likewise concurred to render his condition more miserable: *At the same time there arose a mighty famine in the land*; so that he did not only want wherewithal to supply himself, but was cut off from all hopes of relief from the abundance and superfluity of others. Sin brings many miseries upon us; and God many times sends more and greater than sin brings: and the farther we go on in a sinful course, the more miseries and the greater difficulties we involve ourselves in.

But all these are but light, and inconsiderable, in comparison of the dreadful miseries of another world, to the danger whereof every man that lives a wicked life doth every moment expose himself: so that if we could conquer shame, and had stupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our consciences for them, and the temporal mischiefs and inconveniencies of them; though, for the present gratify-

gratifying of our lusts, we could bruik and dispense with all these; yet the consideration of the end and issue of a sinful course, is an invincible objection against it, and never to be answered. Though the violence of our sensual appetites and inclinations should be able to bear down all temporal considerations whatsoever; yet, methinks, the interest of our everlasting happiness should lie near our hearts; the consideration of another world should mightily amaze and startle us; the horrors of eternal darkness; and the dismal thoughts of being miserable for ever, should effectually discourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the sinner; and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to surprize him the next moment. And can we make too much haste to fly from so great and apparent a danger? When will we think of saving ourselves, if not when, for ought we know, we are upon the very brink of ruin, and just ready to drop into destruction?

5. Upon this naturally follows a full conviction of the necessity of quitting this wicked course. And necessity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than persuade; and, after it is once evident, leaves no place for farther deliberation. And the greater the necessity is, it is still the more cogent argument. For whatever is necessary, is so in order to some end; and the greater the end, the greater is the necessity of the means, without which that end cannot be obtained. Now, the chief and last end of all reasonable creatures, is happiness; and therefore whatever is necessary in order to that, hath the highest degree of rational and moral necessity. We are not capable of happiness till we have left our sins: *For without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*

But though men are convinced of this necessity, yet this doth not always inforce a present change; because men hope they may continue in their sins, and remedy all at last by repentance. But this is so great a hazard in all respects, that there is no venturing upon it. And in matters of greatest concernment, wise men will run no hazard, if they can help it. David was so sensible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance, and the change of his life, for one moment: *I thought on*

*my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* This day, this hour, for ought we know, may be the last opportunity of making our peace with God. Therefore we should make haste out of this dangerous state, as Lot did out of Sodom, lest fire and brimstone overtake us. He that cannot promise himself the next moment, hath a great deal of reason to seize upon the present opportunity. While we are lingering in our sins, if God be not merciful to us, we shall be consumed: therefore *make haste, sinner, and escape for thy life, lest evil overtake thee.*

6. Lastly, An apprehension of the possibility of making this change. God, who designed us for happiness at first, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by sin, was pleased to restore us again to the capacity of it by the redemption of our blessed Lord and Saviour, hath made nothing necessary to our happiness that is impossible for us to do, either of ourselves, or by the assistance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. For that is possible to us which we may do by the assistance of another, if we may have that assistance for asking: and God hath promised to *give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* So that, notwithstanding the great corruption and weakness of our natures, since the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared, it is not absolutely out of our power to leave our sins, and turn to God. For that may truly be said to be in our power, which God hath promised to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

So that there is nothing on God's part to hinder this change. He hath solemnly declared, that he sincerely desires it, and that he is ready to assist our good resolutions to this purpose. And most certainly, when he tells us, that *he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live; that he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth; that he would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,* he means plainly, as he saith, and doth not speak to us with any private reserve, or nice distinction, between his secret and revealed will; that is, he doth not decree one thing,



thing, and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a sinner entertains serious thoughts of returning to God, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to receive him! This is in a very lively manner described to us in the parable of the prodigal son, who when he was returning home, and *was yet a great way off*, what haste doth his father make to meet him? *He saw him, and had compassion, and ran.* And if there be no impediment on God's part, why should there be any on ours? One would think, all the doubt and difficulty should be on the other side, whether God would be pleased to shew mercy to such great offenders as we have been: but the business doth not stick there. And will we be miserable by our own choice, when the grace of God hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the first thing, the course which David here took for the reforming of his life: *I thought on my ways.* I proceed to the

*Second*, The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation: *I turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And if we consider the matter thoroughly, and have but patience to reason out the case with ourselves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to some issue, the conclusion must naturally be, the quitting of that evil and dangerous course in which we have lived. For sin and consideration cannot long dwell together. Did but men consider what sin is, they would have so many unanswerable objections against it, such strong fears and jealousies of the miserable issue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not say, that this change is perfectly made at once. A state of sin and holiness are not like two ways that are just parted by a line, so as a man may step out of the one full into the other; but they are like two ways that lead to two very distant places, and consequently are at a good distance from one another; and the farther any man hath travelled in the one, the farther he is from the other: so that it requires time and pains to pass from the one to the other. It sometimes so happens, that some persons are by a mighty conviction and resolution, and by a very extraordinary and overpowering degree of

God's grace, almost perfectly reclaimed from their sins at once, and all of a sudden *translated out of the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of his dear Son*. And thus it was with many of the first converts to Christianity; as their prejudices against the Christian religion were strong and violent, so the Holy Spirit of God was pleased to work mightily in them that believed. But, in the usual and settled methods of God's grace, evil habits are mastered and subdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict; and many times after they are routed, they rally, and make head again; and it is a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength and maturity, and before a man come to that confirmed state of goodness, that he may be said to have conquered and mortified his lusts. But yet this ought not to discourage us. For so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way; and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us: and if we pursue our advantages, we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hands: and we who moved at first with so much slowness and difficulty, shall after a while be enabled to run the ways of God's commandments with pleasure and delight.

I have done with the two things I propounded to speak to from these words; the course here prescribed, and the success of it. And now to persuade men to take this course, I shall offer two or three arguments.

I. That consideration is the proper act of reasonable creatures. This argument God himself uses to bring men to a consideration of their evil ways, *II. xlvi. 8. Remember, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.* To consider our ways, and to call our sins to remembrance, is to shew ourselves men. It is the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their present inclinations and appetites, without any consideration of the future consequences of things, and without fear of any thing, but of a present and sensible danger; like brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view, and just ready to fall upon them; whereas to a prudent and considerate man, a good or evil in rever-

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sion is capable of as true an estimation, proportionably to the greatness and distance of it, as if it were really present. And what do we think God has given us our reason and understandings for, but to foresee evils at a distance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future security and happiness; to look up to *God our maker, who hath taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven*; but to consider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes most for our future and lasting interest, and what against it? What can a beast do worse, than to act without any consideration and design, than to pursue his present inclination without any apprehension of true danger? The most dull and stupid of all the brute creatures can hardly exercise less reason than this comes to. So that, for a man not to consider his ways, is, to the very best intents and purposes, to be *without understanding, and like the beasts that perish*.

2. This is the end of God's patience and long-suffering towards us, to bring us to consideration. The great design of God's goodness, is to *lead men to repentance. He winks at the sins of men, that they may repent*. He bears long with us, and delays the punishment of our sins, and doth not execute judgment speedily; because he is loth to surprize men into destruction; because he would give them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, and to consider what they have done, and to reason themselves into repentance. *Consider this, all ye that forget God, lest his patience turn into fury, and he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you*.

3. Consideration is that which we must all come to one time or other. Time will come when we shall consider, and cannot help it; when we shall not be able to divert our thoughts from those things which we are now so loth to think upon. Our consciences will take their opportunity to bring our ways to remembrance, when some great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the prodigal: when he was brought to the very last extremity, and *was ready to perish with hunger, then he came to himself*. When we come to die, then we shall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; and how glad would we then be, that we had time to consider

der them? And perhaps, while we are wishing for more time, eternity will swallow us up. To be sure, in the other world, a great part of the misery of wicked men will consist in furious reflexions upon themselves, and the evil actions of their lives. It is said of the rich voluptuous man in the parable, that *in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment*; as if he had never considered and be-thought himself till that time. But, alas! it will then be too late to consider; for then consideration will do us no good; it will serve to no other purpose, but to aggravate our misery, and to multiply our stings, and to give new life and rage to those vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiser course would it be, to consider these things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redress them, and avoid the dismal consequences of them; than when our case is desperate, and past remedy?

And now what can I say more to persuade every one of us to a consideration of our own ways? We are generally apt to busy ourselves in observing the errors and miscarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and censure the faults and follies of other men; but how few descend into themselves, and turn their eyes inward, and say, *What have I done?* It is an excellent saying of Antoninus the great Emperor and philosopher: "No man  
 " was ever unhappy for not prying into the actions and  
 " conditions of other men; but that man is necessarily  
 " unhappy who doth not observe himself, and consider  
 " the state of his own soul."

- This is our proper work; and now is a proper season for it, when we pretend to God and men to set apart a solemn time for the examination of ourselves, and for a serious review of our lives in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiss. And though we would venture to dissemble with men, yet let us not dissemble with God also: *For shall not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth the soul, shall not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his ways?*

I know it is a very unpleasant work which I am now putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men  
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are generally so backward to it; because it will of necessity give some present disturbance to their minds. They whose lives have been very vicious, are so odious a sight, so horrid a spectacle to themselves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate consideration, and are ready to say to it, as the evil spirit did in the gospel to our Saviour, *What have I to do with thee? art thou come to torment me before the time?* But let not this affright us from it: for whatever trouble it may cause at present, it is the only way to prevent the anguish and the torments of eternity.

The things which I have offered to your consideration, are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and estates, but that which is more truly yourselves, your immortal souls, the dearest and most durable part of yourselves; and they do not concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore bespeak your most serious regard to them in the words of Moses to the people of Israel, after he had set the law of God before them, together with the blessings promised to obedience, and the terrible curse threatned to the transgression of it, Deut. xxxii. 46. 47. *Set your hearts to the words which I testify to you this day: for it is not a vain thing; because it is your life. Your life, your eternal life and happiness depends upon it.*

And besides a tender regard to yourselves and your own interests, which methinks every man, out of a natural desire of being happy, and dread of being miserable, should be forward enough to consider, be pleased likewise to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I speak now to a great many persons, the eminence of whose rank and quality renders their examples so powerful, as to be able almost to give authority either to virtue or vice. People take their fashions from you, as to the habits of their minds, as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefly depends the ruin or reformation of manners, our hopes or despair of a better world. What way soever you go, you are followed by troops. If you run any sinful or dangerous course, you cannot *perish alone in your iniquity; but thousands will fall by your side, and ten thousands at your right hand.* And, on the contrary, it is very much in your power, and I hope.

hope in your wills and designs, to be the sovereign restorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate age. It is our part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but it is you that would be the powerful and effectual preachers of righteousness. We may endeavour to make men profelytes to virtue, but you would infallibly draw disciples after you; we may try to persuade, but you could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to restrain them from being so bad.

Therefore consider your ways, for the sake of others as well as yourselves. Consider what you have done, and then consider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of these things. And to help you forward in this work, it is not necessary that I should rip up the vices of the age, and set mens sins in order before them: it is much better that you yourselves should call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful monitor and witness in our own breasts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this monitor I refer you, and to the grace of God, to make these admonitions effectual.

Let us then, every one of us, in the fear of God, *search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.* Let us take to ourselves words, and say to God, with those true penitents in scripture, *I have sinned, what shall be done unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* For surely it is meet to be said unto God, *I will not offend any more: that which I know not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more. O that there were such an heart in us! O that we were wise, and that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end!* And God of his infinite mercy inspire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy resolution, for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

## S E R M O N      X I V .

The folly and danger of irresolution and delaying.

P S A L. cxix. 60.

*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

**I**N the words immediately going before, you have the course which David took for the reforming of his life, and the success of that course: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.* A serious reflexion upon the past errors and miscarriages of his life, produced the reformation of it. And you have a considerable circumstance added in these words that I have now read to you, that this reformation was speedy, and without delay: *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* Upon due consideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the necessity of a change, he came to a resolution of a better life, and immediately put this resolution in execution: and to declare how presently and quickly he did it, he expresses it both affirmatively and negatively, after the manner of the Hebrews, who, when they would say a thing with great certainty and emphasis, are wont to express it both ways: *I made haste, and delayed not*; that is, I did with all imaginable speed betake myself to a better course.

And this is the natural effect of consideration. And the true cause why men delay so necessary a work, is, because they stifle their reason, and suffer themselves to be hurried into the embraces of present objects, and do not consider their latter end, and what will be the sad issue and event of a wicked life. For if men would take an impartial view of their lives, and but now and then reflect upon themselves, and lay to heart the miserable and fatal consequences of a sinful course, and think whither it will bring them at last, and that the end of these things will be death and misery: if the carnal and sensual person



son would but look about him, and consider how many have been ruined in the way that he is in, how many lie slain and wounded in it; that it is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death; this would certainly give a check to him, and stop him in his course.

For it is not to be imagined, but that that man who hath duly considered what sin is, the shortness of its pleasures, and the eternity of its punishment, should resolve immediately to break off his sins, and to live another kind of life. Would any man be intemperate, and walk after the flesh; would any man be unjust, and defraud or oppress his neighbour; be profane, and live in the contempt of God and religion, or allow himself in any wicked course whatsoever, that considers and believes a judgment to come, and that because of these things the terrible vengeance of God will one day fall upon the children of disobedience? It is not credible that men, who apply themselves seriously to the meditation of these matters, should venture to continue in so imprudent and dangerous a course, or could, by any temptation whatsoever, be trained on one step farther in a way that does so certainly and visibly lead to ruin and destruction.

So that my work at this time shall be, to endeavour to convince men of the monstrous folly and unreasonableness of delaying the reformation and amendment of their lives; and to persuade us to resolve upon it, and, having resolved, to set about it immediately, and without delay; in imitation of the good man here in the text: *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And, to this end, I shall,

1. Consider the reasons and excuses which men pretend for delaying this necessary work, and shew the unreasonableness of them.

2. I shall add some farther considerations to engage us effectually to set about this work speedily, and without delay.

1. We will consider a little the reasons and excuses which men pretend for delaying this necessary work; and not only shew the unreasonableness of them, but that they are each of them a strong reason and powerful argument to the contrary.

1. Many pretend that they are abundantly convinced of

of the great necessity of leaving their sins, and betaking themselves to a better course, and they fully intend to do so; only they cannot at present bring themselves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper and disposition; and then they resolve, by God's grace, to set about this work in good earnest, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be fit to call this a reason; I am sure it is the greatest cheat and delusion that any man can put upon himself: for this plainly shews, that thou dost not intend to do this, which thou art convinced is so necessary, but to put it off from day to day. For there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithstanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all respects, better do it at present than hereafter, yet he still puts it off. Whatever thou pretendest, this is a mere shift to get rid of a present trouble. It is like giving good words and making fair promises to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conscience that he intends not to pay him, and that he shall be less able to discharge the debt then, than he is at present. Whatever reasons thou hast against reforming thy life now, will still remain, and be in as full force hereafter, nay probably stronger, than they are at present. Thou art unwilling now; and so thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling. So that this reason will every day improve upon thy hands, and have so much the more strength, by how much the longer thou continuest in thy sins. Thou hast no reason in the world against the present time, but only that it is present; why, when hereafter comes to be present, the reason will be just the same. So that thy present unwillingness is so far from being a just reason against it, that it is a good reason the other way: Because thou art unwilling now, and like to be so, nay more so, hereafter; if thou intendest to do it at all, thou shouldst set about it immediately, and without delay.

2. Another reason which men pretend for the delaying of this work, is the great difficulty and unpleasantness of it. And it cannot be denied, but that there will be some bitterness and uneasiness in it, proportionably to the

growth of evil habits, and the strength of our lusts, and our greater or less progress and continuance in a sinful course. So that we must make account of a sharp conflict, of some pain and trouble, in the making of this change; that it will cost us some pangs and throws before we be born again: for when nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected, that it should be reduced and brought back to its first straightness without pain and violence.

But then it is to be considered, that how difficult and painful soever this work be, it is necessary; and that should over-rule all other considerations whatsoever: that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we must one time or other endure far greater than those which we now seek to avoid: that it is not so difficult as we imagine; but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove. If we were but once resolved upon the work, and seriously engaged in it, the greatest part of the trouble were over. It is like the fear of children to go into the cold water; a faint trial increaseth their fear and apprehension of it; but so soon as they have plunged into it, the trouble is over; and then they wonder why they were so much afraid. The main difficulty and unpleasantness is in our first entrance into religion: it presently grows tolerable, and soon after easy; and after that, by degrees, so pleasant and delightful, that the man would not for all the world return to his former evil state and condition of life.

We should consider likewise what is the true cause of all this trouble and difficulty. It is our long continuance in a sinful course that hath made us so loth to leave it: it is the custom of sinning that renders it so troublesome and uneasy to men to do otherwise: it is the greatness of our guilt, heightened and inflamed by many and repeated provocations, that doth so gall our consciences, and fill our souls with so much terror: it is because we have gone so far in an evil way, that our retreat is become so difficult, and because we have delayed this work so long, that we are now so unwilling to go about it; and, consequently, the longer we delay it, the trouble and difficulty of a change will increase daily upon us. And all these considerations are so far from being a good reason for more  
delays,

delays, that they are a strong argument to the contrary. Because the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more so; and because your delays have increased the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

3. Another pretended encouragement to these delays, is the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears longer with sinners; and therefore there is no such absolute and urgent necessity of a speedy repentance, and reformation of our lives. Men have not the face to give this for a reason; but yet for all that it lies at the bottom of many mens hearts. So Solomon tells us, Eccl. viii. 11. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

But it is not always thus. There are few of us but have seen several instances of God's severity to sinners, and have known several persons surpris'd by a sudden hand of God, and cut off in the very act of sin, without having the least respite given them, without time or liberty so much as to ask God forgiveness, and to consider either what they had done, or whither they were going. And this may be the case of any sinner; and is so much the more likely to be thy case, because thou dost so boldly presume upon the mercy and patience of God.

But if it were always thus, and thou wert sure to be spared yet a while longer, what can be more unreasonable and disingenuous, than to resolve to be evil, because God is good; and because he suffers so long, to sin so much the longer; and because he affords thee a space of repentance, therefore to delay it, and put it off to the last? The proper design of God's goodness, is to lead men to repentance; and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their sins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

These are the pretended reasons and encouragements to men to delay their repentance, and the reformation of their lives; and you see how groundless and unreasonable they are; which was the first thing I propounded to speak to.

II. I shall add some farther considerations, to engage men effectually to set about this work speedily, and without delay. And because they are many, I shall insist upon those which are most weighty and considerable, without being very curious and solicitous about the method and order of them: for, provided they be but effectual to the end of persuasion, it matters not how inartificially they are ranged and disposed.

1. Consider, that in matters of great and necessary concernment, and which must be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind, than irresolution; to be undetermined where the case is so plain, and the necessity so urgent; to be always about doing that which we are convinced must be done.

*Vituros agimus semper, nec vivimus unquam:*

“ We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to set about it.” This is as if a man should put off eating, and drinking, and sleeping, from one day and night to another, till he have starved and destroyed himself. It seldom falls under any man’s deliberation, whether he should live or not, if he can chuse; and if he cannot chuse, it is in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more absurd to deliberate, whether we should live virtuously or religiously, soberly or righteously in the world; for that upon the matter is to consult, whether a man should be happy or not. Nature hath determined this for us, and we need not reason about it; and, consequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is so necessary in order to it.

2. Consider, that religion is a great and a long work; and asks so much time, that there is none left for the delaying of it. To begin with repentance, which is commonly our first entrance into religion; this alone is a great work; and it is not only the business of a sudden thought and resolution, but of execution and action: it is the abandoning of a sinful course, which we cannot leave, till we have in some degree mastered our lusts; for so long as they are our masters, like Pharaoh, they will keep us in bondage, and not let us go to serve the Lord. The habits of sin and vice are not to be plucked up and cast off at once: as they have been long in contracting,

tracting, so, without a miracle, it will require a competent time to subdue them, and get the victory over them; for they are conquered just by the same degrees that the habits of grace and virtue grow up and get strength in us.

So that there are several duties to be done in religion, and often to be repeated: many graces and virtues are to be long practised and exercised, before the contrary vices will be subdued, and before we arrive to a confirmed and settled state of goodness; such a state as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the sincerity of our resolution and repentance, and of our good condition towards God. We have many lusts to mortify; many passions to govern, and bring into order; much good to do, to make what amends and reparation we can for the much evil we have done: we have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we shall be strongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits and customs: and perhaps we have satisfaction and restitution to make for the many injuries we have done to others, in their persons, or estates, or reputations: in a word, we have a *body of sin* to put off, which clings close to us, and is hard to part with: we have to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*; to increase and improve our graces and virtues; to *add to our faith, knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity*; and to *abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God*: we have to be useful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous conversation; our *light is so to shine before men, that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.*

And do we think all this is to be done in an instant, and requires no time? that we may delay and put off to the last, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of sickness and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing; when the spirit of a man can hardly bear the infirmities of nature, much less a guilty conscience and a wounded spirit? Do we think, that when the day hath been idly spent and squandered

dered away by us, that we shall be fit to work when the night and darkness comes? When our understanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will crooked, and, by a long custom of sinning, obstinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in religion? what reasonable or acceptable service can we then perform to God? When our candle is just sinking into the socket, how shall our light so shine before men, that others may see our good works?

Alas! the longest life is no more than sufficient for a man to reform himself in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiss; to put our souls into a good posture and preparation for another world, to train up ourselves for eternity, and to make ourselves *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light?*

3. Consider what a desperate hazard we run by these delays. Every delay of repentance is a venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we shall have time for it; and if we have time, whether we shall have a heart to it, and the assistance of God's grace to go through with it. God hath indeed been graciously pleased to promise pardon to repentance: but he hath no where promised life and leisure, the aids of his grace and Holy Spirit, to those who put off their repentance; he hath no where promised acceptance to mere sorrow and trouble for sin, without *fruits meet for repentance*, and amendment of life; he hath no where promised to receive them to mercy and favour, who only give him good words, and are at last contented to condescend so far to him, as to promise to leave their sins when they can keep them no longer. Many have gone thus far in times of affliction and sickness, as to be awakened to a great sense of their sins, and to be mightily troubled for their wicked lives, and to make solemn promises and professions of becoming better; and yet, upon their deliverance and recovery, all hath vanished and come to nothing, and their *righteousness hath been as the morning-cloud, and as the early dew, which passeth away*. And why should any man merely upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himself in a better condition than those persons, who have done as much, and gone as far as he? And there



there is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tried, and proved insincere, but the death-bed repentance never came to a trial; and yet for all that, God knows whether it was sincere or not, and how it would have proved, if the man had lived longer. Why should any man, for offering up to God the mere refuse and dregs of his life, and the days *which himself hath no pleasure in*, except to receive the reward of eternal life and happiness at his hands?

But though we do not design to delay this work so long; yet we ought to consider, that all delays in a matter of this consequence are extremely dangerous; because we put off a business of the greatest concernment to the future, and in so doing put it to the hazard whether ever it shall be done: for the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is past. Indeed if we could arrest time, and strike off the nimble wheels of his chariot, and, like Joshua, bid the sun stand still, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occasion for it; this were something to excuse our delay, or at least to mitigate or abate the folly and unreasonableness of it: but this we cannot do. It is in our power, under the influence of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to amend our lives now; but it is not in our power to live till to-morrow: and who will part with an estate in hand, which he may presently enter upon the possession of, for an uncertain reversion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlasting concernments of our souls: we trifle away the present opportunities of salvation, and vainly promise to ourselves the future: we let go that which is in our power, and fondly dispose of that which is out of our power, and in the hands of God.

Lay hold then upon the present opportunities, and look upon every action thou dost, and every opportunity of doing any, as possibly thy last; for so it may prove, for any thing thou canst tell to the contrary. If a man's life lay at stake, and he had but one throw for it, with what care and with what concernment would he manage that action? what art thou doing next, may, for ought thou knowest, be for thy life, and for all eternity. So much of thy life is most certainly past; and God knows  
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thou hast yet done little or nothing towards the securing of thy future happiness : it is not certain how much or how little is remaining ; therefore be sure to make the best use of that little which may be left, and wisely to manage the last stake.

4. Seeing the delay of repentance doth mainly rely upon the hopes and encouragement of a future repentance, let us consider a little how unreasonable these hopes are, and how absurd the encouragement is which men take from them. To sin, in hopes that hereafter we shall repent, is to do a thing in hopes that we shall one day be mightily ashamed of it, that we shall one time or other be heartily grieved and troubled that we have done it : it is to do a thing in hopes that we shall afterward condemn ourselves for it, and wish a thousand times we had never done it ; in hopes that we shall be full of horror at the thoughts of what we have done, and shall treasure up so much guilt in our consciences as will make us a terror to ourselves, and be ready to drive us even to despair and distraction. And is this a reasonable hope ? Is this a fitting encouragement for a wise man to give up himself, to any action ? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of mens going on in their sins, in hopes that hereafter they shall repent of them.

5. If you be still resolved to delay this business, and put it off at present, consider well with yourselves how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the last, nor till sickness come, and death makes his approaches to you. This is next to madness, to venture all upon such an after game. It is just as if a man should be content to be shipwrecked, in hopes that he shall afterwards escape by a plank, and get safe to shore. But I hope none are so unreasonable ; yet I fear that many have a mind to put it off to old age, tho' they do not care to say so. Seneca expostulates excellently with this sort of men : “ Who shall insure thy life all that time ? Who shall pass his word for thee, that the providence of God will suffer all things to happen and fall out just as thou hast designed and forecast them ? Art thou not ashamed to reserve the relicks of thy life for thyself, and to set apart only that time to be wise and virtuous in, which is good for nothing ? How late is it then to begin to  
“ live

“ live well, when thy life is almost at an end? What a  
 “ stupid forgetfulness is it of our mortality, to put off  
 “ good resolutions to the fiftieth or sixtieth year of our  
 “ age, and resolve to begin to do better at that time of  
 “ life to which very few persons have reached.”

But perhaps thou art not altogether so unreasonable, but desirest only to respite this work till the first heat of youth and lust be over, till the cooler and more considerate part of thy life come on; that perhaps thou thinkest may be the fittest and most convenient season. But still we reckon upon uncertainties; for perhaps that season may never be. However, to be sure it is much more in our power, by the assistance of God's grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, to conquer our lusts now, and to resist the most heady and violent temptations of vice, than either to secure the future time, or to recover that which is once past and gone.

Some seem yet more reasonable, and are content to come lower, and desire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? why till to-morrow? To-morrow will be as this day; only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be more unwilling and indisposed then.

So that there is no future time which any man can reasonably pitch upon. All delay in these cases is dangerous, and as senseless as the expectation of the idiot described by the poet; who, being come to the river-side, and intending to pass over, stays till all the water in the river be gone by, and hath left the channel a dry passage for him:

— *At ille*

*Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis ævum.*

“ But the river runs, and runs, and will run; and if he  
 “ should stay a thousand years, will never be the nearer  
 “ being dry.” So that, if the man must go over, and there be a necessity for it, as there is for repentance, the only wise resolution to be taken in this case, is, to wade or swim over as well as he can; because the matter will never be amended by tarrying.

6 Lastly, Consider what an unspeakable happiness it is, to have our minds settled in that condition, that we  
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may without fear and amazement, nay, with comfort and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us; and the general judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of: for *of that day and hour knoweth no man*. And there are two terrible things, and nothing can free us from the terror of them, but a good conscience; and a good conscience is only to be had, either by innocence, or by repentance, and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with God, and with himself; and can think of death and judgment without dread and astonishment. For *the sting of death is sin*; and the terror of the great day only concerns those who have lived wickedly and impudently, and would not be persuaded, neither by the mercies of God, nor by the fear of his judgments, to repent, and turn to him. But if we have truly forsaken our sins, and do sincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the laws and commands of God, the more we think of death and judgment, the greater matter of joy and comfort will these things be to us: for *blessed is the servant whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing*. Let us therefore as soon as possibly we can, put ourselves into this posture and preparation; according to the advice of our blessed Saviour, Luke xii. 35. 36. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord*.

And now, I hope that enough hath been said to convince men of the great unreasonableness and folly of these delays: nay, I believe, that most men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their consciences call them fools a thousand times for it. But O, that I knew what to say that might prevail with men, and effectually persuade them to do that which they are so abundantly convinced is so necessary.

And here I might address myself to the several ages of persons. You that are young, and have hitherto been in a great measure innocent, may prevent the devil, and by an early piety give God the first possessions of your souls; and by this means never be put to the trouble of so great and solemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life. You may do a glorious, I had almost said a meritorious thing, in cleaving stedfastly

fastly to God, and resolving to serve him, when you are so importunately courted and so hotly assaulted by the devil and the world. However, you may not live to be old; therefore, upon that consideration, begin the work presently, and make use of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to ripeness of years, and are in the full vigour of your age, you are to be put in mind, that the heat and inconsiderateness of youth is now past and gone; that reason and consideration are now in their perfection and strength; that this is the very age of prudence and discretion, of wisdom and wariness: so that now is the proper time for you to be serious, and wisely to secure your future happiness.

As for those that are old, they, methinks, should need no body to admonish them, that it is now high time for them to begin a new life, and that the time past of their lives is too much to have been spent in sin and folly. There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your sun is certainly going down, and near its setting; therefore you should quicken your pace, considering that your journey is never the shorter, because you have but little time to perform it in. Alas! man, thou art just ready to die, and hast thou not yet begun to live? Are thy passions and lusts yet unsubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? It is strange to see how, in the very extremities of old age, many men are as if they had still a thousand years to live; and make no preparation for death, though it dogs them at the heels, and is just come up to them, and ready to give them the fatal stroke.

Therefore let us not put off this necessary work of reforming ourselves in what part and age of our lives soever we be: *To day, whilst it is called to day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* Nay, to day is with us the latest to begin this work; had we been wise, we would have begun it sooner. It is God's infinite mercy to us that it is not quite too late, that the day of God's patience is not quite expired, and the door shut against us. Therefore do not defer your repentance to the next solemn time, to the next occasion of receiving  
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the blessed sacrament: do not say, I will then reform, and become a new man; after that I will take leave of my lusts, and sin no more. For let us make what haste we can, we cannot possibly make too much:

—*Prosperat vivere nemo satis:*

“No man makes haste enough to be good;” *to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well.* Be as quick as we will, life will be too nimble for us, and go on faster than our work does; and death will go nigh to prevent us, and surprize us unawares.

Do, do, sinner; abuse and neglect thyself yet a little while longer, till the time of regarding thy soul, and working out thy own salvation, be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concernment be slipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back again; no not by thy most earnest wishes and desires, by thy most fervent prayers and tears; and thou be brought into the condition of profane Elau, who, for once despising the blessing, lost it for ever, and *found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

To conclude: Art thou convinced that thy eternal happiness depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Why then, do but behave thyself in this case as thou and all prudent men are wont to do, in matters which thou canst not but acknowledge to be of far less concernment. If a man be travelling to such a place, so soon as he finds himself out of the way, he presently stops, and makes towards the right way, and hath no inclination to go wrong any farther. If a man be sick, he will be well presently, if he can, and not put it off to the future. Most men will gladly take the first opportunity that presents itself of being rich or great; every man almost catches at the very first offers of a great place, or a good purchase, and secures them presently if he can, lest the opportunity be gone, and another snatch these things from him. Do thou thus so much more in matters so much greater. Return from the error of thy ways; be wise, save thyself, as soon as possibly thou canst. What happiness presents itself to thee, do not turn it off, and bid it come again to-morrow. Perhaps thou

thou mayest never be so fairly offered again; perhaps the day of salvation may not come again to-morrow; nay, perhaps to thee to-morrow may never come. But if we were sure that happiness would come again, yet why should we put it off? Does any man know how to be safe and happy to day, and can he find in his heart to tarry till to-morrow?

Now, the God of all mercy and patience, give every one of us the wisdom and grace to *know*, and to *do in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes*, for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XV.

The distinguishing character of a good and a bad man.

I JOHN iii. 10.

*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

**I**T is certainly a matter of the greatest consequence to us, both in order to our present peace and future happiness, truly to understand our spiritual state and condition, and whether we belong to God, and be his children, or not. And it is not so difficult as is commonly imagined, to arrive at this knowledge, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with ourselves; for the text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it: *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

From which words I shall endeavour, by God's assistance, to lay men open to themselves, and to represent



to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of God, and every man's serious consideration, to make the best use of it.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter, to consider briefly the occasion of these words. And this will best appear by attending stedfastly to the main scope and design of this epistle. And I think that no man that reads it with attention, can doubt, but that it is particularly designed against the impious sect of the Gnosticks, who, as the fathers tell us, sprang from Simon Magus, and pretended to extraordinary knowledge and illumination; from whence they had the name of *Gnosticks*: but, notwithstanding this glittering pretence, they did allow themselves in all manner of impious and vitious practices, *turning the grace of God into lasciviousness*, as St. Jude speaks of them. And that St. John aims particularly at this sort of men, is very evident from the frequent and plain allusions throughout this epistle, to those names and titles which this sect assumed to themselves: as, Ep. 1. chap. ii. 4. *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*; and, v. 9. *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now*. Which passages, and many more in this epistle, do plainly refer to the pretences of this sect, to more than ordinary knowledge and illumination in the mysteries of religion, notwithstanding they did so notoriously contradict these glorious pretences, by the impiety of their lives, and particularly by their hatred and enmity to their fellow-christians. For, as the ancient fathers tell us, they pretended, that, whatever they did, they could not sin. And this our Apostle intimates in the beginning of this epistle: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*. And they held it lawful to renounce Christianity to avoid persecution; and not only so, but also to join with the Heathen in persecuting the Christians; which seems to be the reason why the Apostle so often taxeth them for hatred to their brethren, and calls them murderers.

Now, to shew the inconsistency of these principles and practices with Christianity, the Apostle useth many arguments; amongst which he particularly insisteth up-

on this, that nothing is more essential to a *disciple of Christ*, and a *child of God*, by which titles Christians were commonly known, than to abstain from the practice of all sin and wickedness: v. 6. of this chapter, *Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not: whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him*; whatever knowledge they might pretend to, it was evident they were destitute of the true knowledge of God, and his son Jesus Christ; and, v. 7. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous*; and, v. 8. *He that committeth sin, is of the devil*; and, v. 9. *Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin*. Let men pretend what they will, wickedness is a plain mark and character of one that belongs to the devil; as, on the contrary, righteousness is an evidence of a child of God: *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil, &c.*

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them.

By *the children of God*, and *the children of the devil*, are meant good and bad men; it being usual in the phrase of scripture, to call persons or things which partake of such a nature or quality, the children of those who are eminently endued with that nature and disposition. Thus they who are of the faith of Abraham, and do the works of Abraham, are called *Abraham's children*: in like manner, those who in their dispositions and actions imitate God, are called *the children of God*; and, on the contrary, those that addict themselves to sin and impiety, are counted of another race and descent; they resemble the devil, and belong to him as the chief and head of that faction.

By *righteousness* is here meant universal goodness, and conformity to the law of God, in opposition to sin, which is the transgression of that law.

By *being manifest* is meant, that hereby good and bad men are really distinguished; so that every one that will examine his condition by this mark, may know of which number he is, and to what party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words; which is, to give us a certain character and mark of distinction between a good and a bad man: *εν τω*.

*By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

In the management of the following discourse, I shall proceed in this method.

1. We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here laid down: *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

2. I shall endeavour to shew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledge of his spiritual state and condition: *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.*

3. I shall inquire whence it comes to pass, that, notwithstanding this, so many persons are at so great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here in the text: *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God*; which implies likewise, on the contrary, that *whosoever doth righteousness, is of God*. Now, in the strictest sense of this phrase, he only who lives in all the commandments of God blameless, can be said to *do righteousness*. But in this sense *there is none that doth righteousness, no, not one*; and consequently none could be the children of God: but the text supposes some to be so; and therefore, by *doing righteousness* the Apostle must necessarily be understood to mean, something that is short of perfect and unfinning obedience. So that the question is, What *doing of righteousness* is sufficient to denominate a man *a child of God*, and to put him into a state of grace and favour with him?

And I do not intend nicely to state this matter. It is not perhaps possible to be done; nothing being more difficult, than to determine the very utmost bounds and limits of things; and to tell exactly, and just to a point, where the line of difference between virtue and vice, between the state of a good and a bad man, is to be placed: and, if it could be done, it would be of no great use; for I take it to be no part of my business, to tell men how many faults they may have, and how little goodness, and yet be the children of God; but rather to acquaint them what degrees of holiness and goodness are

are necessary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good estate towards God; and then to persuade them, in order to their peace and assurance, to endeavour after such degrees.

Wherefore, to state the business so far as is necessary to give men a sufficient knowledge of their condition, I shall briefly consider who they are, that, in the Apostle's sense, may be said to be *doers of righteousness*, or *not doers of it*. And because the Apostle lays down the rule negatively, I shall therefore,

In the first place, inquire who they are, that, in the Apostle's sense, may be said *not to do righteousness*.

1. They that live in the general course of a wicked life, in the practice of great and known sins, as injustice, intemperance, filthy and sensual lusts, profane neglect and contempt of God and religion; so that, by the whole course and tenor of their actions, it is plain, beyond all denial, that *there is no fear of God before their eyes*. Concerning these the case is so very evident, that it seems too mild and gentle an expression, to call them *not doers of righteousness*.

2. They who live in the habitual practice of any one known sin, or in the neglect of any considerable part of their known duty. For any vicious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil state.

3. They who are guilty of the single act of a very heinous and notorious crime, as a deliberate act of blasphemy, of murder, perjury, fraud, or oppression, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one single act of sin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general course of the man's life is contrary; yet the single acts of some sorts of sins are so crying and heinous, and do so stare every man's conscience in the face, that they are justly esteemed to be of equal malignity with vicious habits of an inferior kind; because they do almost necessarily suppose a great depravation of mind, and a monstrous alienation from God and goodness, in the person that deliberately commits them. And they who are guilty in any of these three degrees now mentioned, are most certainly *not doers of righteousness*; and consequently it is manifest that they are not the children of God.

In the second place, I shall inquire who they are that, in the Apostle's sense, may be said to *do righteousness*. In short, they who in the general course of their lives do keep the commandments of God. And thus the scripture generally expresseth this matter, by *keeping the commandments of God*, and by *having respect to all his commandments*; by *obedience to the gospel of Christ*; by being *holy in all manner of conversation*; by *abstaining from all kind of evil*; by *cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*; and by *practising holiness in the fear of God*. To which I shall add the description which St. Luke gives us of the righteousness of Zacharias and Elisabeth, Luke i. 6. *They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless*. All which expressions do plainly signify the actual conformity of our lives and actions, in the general course and tenor of them, to the laws and commands of God. And this implies these two things; that the tenor of our lives and actions be agreeable to these laws of God; and that these actions be done with a sincere and upright mind, out of regard to God and another world, and not for low and temporal ends.

And I chuse rather to describe a righteous man by the actual conformity of the general course of his actions to the law of God, than, as some have done, by a sincere desire or resolution of obedience. For a desire may be sincere for the time it lasts, and yet vanish before it comes to any real effect. And how innocently soever it was intended, it is certainly a great mistake in divinity, and of very dangerous consequence to the souls of men, to affirm, that a desire of grace is grace; and, consequently, by the same reason, that a desire of obedience is obedience. A sincere desire and resolution to be good, is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cherished and encouraged; but yet it is far enough from being the thing desired, or from being accepted for it in the esteem of God: for God never accepts the desire for the deed, but where there is no possibility, no opportunity of doing the thing desired; but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reason to imagine that the desire in that case should be accepted, as if the thing were done. For instance: If  
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a man gives alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able; in this case, the desire is accepted for the deed. And of this case it is, and no other, that the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. viii. 12. *If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not; that is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men, according to the largeness of their hearts, and not according to the straitness of their fortunes.* But it is a great mistake, to draw a general conclusion from this text, that in all cases God accepts the will for the deed. For though a man sincerely desire and resolve to reform his life, as I doubt not many men often do, but do it not when there is time and opportunity for it, these desires and resolutions are of no account with God; all this *righteousness is but as the morning-cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away.* Men are not apt to mistake so grossly in other matters. No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirst to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and sincerity of these natural desires. No man thinks that covetousness, or a greedy desire to be rich, is an estate; or that ambition, or an insatiable desire of honour, is really advancement: just so, and no otherwise, a desire to be good is righteousness. The Apostle's caution, a little before the text, may fitly be applied to this purpose: *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Not but that the best of men do sometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by surprise, and borne down by the violence of temptation. But, if the general course of our actions be a *doing of righteousness*, the grace of the gospel, in and through the merits of our blessed Saviour, doth accept of this imperfect, but sincere obedience.

II. I shall endeavour to shew, That, by this mark, every man may with due care and diligence arrive at the certain knowledge of his spiritual state and condition: *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.* By which the Apostle means, that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, and that

that whereby they very often manifest themselves to others; especially when the course of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriously impious and wicked. But, because it doth not so much concern us curiously to inquire into, much less severely to censure the state of other men, I shall only consider at present how far, by this mark and character, every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man may certainly know himself to be so, if he will but consider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himself. As for those who are vicious in the general course of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of some heinous or notorious sin not yet repented of, their case is so plain for the most part, even to themselves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men stand continually convicted and condemned by the sentence of their own minds: and whenever they reflect upon themselves, which they do as seldom as they can, they are a *terror to themselves*, and full of amazement, and fearful expectation of judgment. Not but that even, in so plain a case, many men do use great endeavours to cheat themselves, and would be very glad to find out ways to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven, and to gain the favour, at least the forgiveness of God, without repentance, and amendment of their lives. And to this end, they are willing to confess their sins, and to undergo any penance that shall be imposed upon them, that only excepted which only can do them good; I mean, real reformation: and, when the priest hath absolved them, they would fain believe that God hath forgiven them too. However, they return to their former course; and, being strongly addicted to their lusts, between stupidity and foolish hopes, they at last come to this desperate resolution, to venture all upon the absolution of the priest, & *valeat quantum valere potest*, "let it have what effect it can;" though I dare say, that, in their most serious thoughts, they are horribly afraid it will do them no good.

And for those who are sinners of a lesser rate, and perhaps



perhaps allow themselves only in one kind of vice, they likewise have reason to conclude themselves in a bad condition; especially if they consider, that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God, is guilty of all; because he contemns that authority which enacted the whole law. And it is easy for any man to discern the habit of any sin in himself; as, when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm resolutions against it, when he useth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it, or, however, still continues in the practice of it: for the customary practice of any known sin, is utterly inconsistent with sincere resolutions and endeavours against it, there being no greater evidence of the insincerity of resolutions and endeavours in any kind, than still to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this character likewise, they that are sincerely good may generally be well assured of their good condition, and that they are *the children of God*. And there are but two things necessary to evidence this to them; that the general course and tenor of their actions be agreeable to the laws of God, and that they be sincere and upright in those actions. And both these every man may sufficiently know concerning himself: for, if the laws of God be plain, and lie open to every man's understanding, then it is as easy for every man to know when he obeys God and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his father or his prince, and when he keeps the known laws of the land. And no sensible and considerate man ever had any doubt of this kind: for if a man can know any thing, he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks a known law; so that all doubts of this nature are frivolous and idle pretences to cover mens faults, and such as they would be ashamed to alledge in any other case.

And a good man may likewise know when he obeys God sincerely. Not but that men often deceive themselves with an opinion, or at least a groundless hope of their own sincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themselves, and use due care and diligence, there are very few cases, if any, wherein they may not know their own sincerity in any act of obedience to God. For what  
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can a man know concerning himself, if not the reality of his own intentions? If any man should in earnest tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendship for me which he made profession of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and sincere; I confess I should doubt of it too: because I should certainly conclude, that no man could know that matter so well as he himself.

And there is no doubt, but whoever hath a hearty kindness for another, and a sincere desire to serve and please him, knows he has it. And accordingly good and holy men in scripture do every where, with great confidence and assurance, appeal to God concerning the integrity and sincerity of their hearts towards him. Job and David, Hezekiah and Nehemiah, in the Old Testament; and in the New, St. Paul for himself and Timothy, make this solemn profession of their sincerity, 2 Cor. i. 12. *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world.* And I cannot call to mind so much as any one passage in scripture, from whence it can be collected, that any good man ever doubted of his own sincerity. And to say the truth, it would not be modesty, but impudence in any man, to declare that he suspects himself of hypocrisy; good men have always abhorred the thoughts of it. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job,* and yet he could not bear to have his integrity questioned. It was a brave and generous speech of his, *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me.*

And yet it hath so happened, that this is become a very common doubt among religious people; and they have been so unreasonably cherished in it, as to have it made a considerable evidence of a man's sincerity, to doubt of it himself. It is indeed said in scripture, Jer. xvii. 9. *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* which is true concerning our future intentions and actions; no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did Hazael think that ever he should do those things which the Prophet foretold him. But though this be true in itself, yet it is not the meaning of that text. For the Prophet, in that chapter, plainly makes use of this consideration, of the  
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fallhood and deceitfulness of man's heart, as an argument to take off the people of Israel from *trusting in the arm of flesh*, and in those promises which were made to them of foreign assistance from Egypt: because men may pretend fair, and yet deceive those that rely upon them; for *the heart of man is deceitful, and desperately wicked*; and none but God knows whether mens inward intentions be answerable to their outward professions; *for he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins*. And this I verily believe is all that the Prophet here intends, that there is a great deal of fraud and deceit in the hearts of bad men, so that no man can rely upon their promises and professions, but God knows the hearts of all men. But now, because God alone knows the hearts of all men, and the sincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow, that it is a thing either impossible or very difficult for any man to know the sincerity of his own present intentions and actions? To make any such conclusion, were to *condemn the generation of God's children*, those holy and excellent men in scripture, Job, and David, and Hezekiah, and St. Paul, who do so frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And surely when the Apostle saith, *No man knows the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him*, he plainly supposes, that every man is conscious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have insisted the longer upon this, that I might, from the very foundation, destroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in itself, but has likewise been a very great hinderance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us inquire whence it comes to pass, that, notwithstanding this, so many persons are at so great uncertainty about their spiritual condition. For the clearing of this matter, we will distinctly consider these three things. 1. The grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. 2. The causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good; concerning their bad condition. And, 3. The just causes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriously bad, and live in the practice of known vices, these do not fall under our consideration. If they be troubled about their condition,

dition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is less than they ought to be. To persons in this condition, there is only counsel to be given to leave their sins, and become better; but no comfort to be administered to them till first they have followed that counsel: for, till they reform, if they think themselves to be in a bad condition, they think just as they ought, and as there is great reason; and no body should go about to persuade them otherwise.

1. First then, we will consider the grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. I do not now mean the worst of men, but such as make some shew and appearance of goodness. It is very displeasing to men to fall under the hard opinion and censure of others; but the most grievous thing in the world, for a man to be condemned by himself; and therefore it is no wonder that men use all manner of shifts to avoid so great an inconvenience, as is the ill opinion of a man's self concerning himself and his own condition.

Some therefore rely upon the profession of the Christian faith, and their being baptized into it. But this is so far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greatest and most solemn obligation to it. Dost thou believe the doctrine of the gospel? thou of all men art inexcusable, if thou allowest thyself in ungodliness and worldly lusts. Others trust to their external devotion; they frequent the church, and serve God constantly; they pray to him, and hear his word, and receive the blessed sacrament: but let us not deceive ourselves, God is not mocked. All this is so far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that, on the contrary, the impiety of our lives spoils all the acceptance of our devotions: *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, (that is, from obeying it) even his prayer shall be an abomination.*

Others, who are sensible they are very bad, depend very much upon their repentance, especially if they set solemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt, but that a sincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: but then it is to be considered, that no repentance is sincere, but that which produceth a real change  
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and reformation in our lives. For we have not repented to purpose, if we return again to our sins. It is well thou art in some measure sensible of thy miscarriage; but thou art never safe, till thou hast forsaken thy sins; thy estate and condition towards God is not changed, till thou hast really altered thyself, and the course of thy life.

Others satisfy themselves with the exercise of some particular graces and virtues; justice, and liberality, and charity. And is it not a thousand pities that thy life is not all of a piece, and that all the other parts of it are not answerable to these; that thou should lose the reward of so much real goodness, out of thy fondness to any one vice or lust; that when *thou art not far from the kingdom of God*, for lake of one or two things more thou shouldst fall short of it? Hast thou never heard what the scripture saith, that *he who offendeth in one point, is a transgressor of the whole law*? To make a man a good man, all parts of goodness must concur; but one way of wickedness, is sufficient to denominate a man bad.

Lastly, Some who are very careful of their outward carriage and conversation, but yet are conscious to themselves of great secret faults and vices, when they can find no comfort from themselves, and the testimony of their own consciences, are apt to comfort themselves in the good opinion which perhaps others have of them. But if we know ourselves to be bad, and *our own hearts to condemn us*, it is not the good opinion of others concerning us which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reason for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Trust no body concerning thyself rather than thyself; because no body can know thee so well as thou mayest know thyself.

These, and such as these, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which Job elegantly compares to the spider's web, finely and artificially wrought, but miserably thin and weak; so that we ourselves may see through them; and, if we lay the least stress upon them, they will break. They are but pleasant dreams and delusions, which, whenever we are awakened to a serious consideration of our condition, by the apprehensions of approaching death and judgment, will presently vanish and disappear. So the

same holy man tells us, Job xxvii. 8. *What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his soul?*

2. We will consider, in the next place, the causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. For as some are prone, beyond all reason, to delude themselves with vain hopes of their good condition; so others are apt as unreasonably to torment themselves with groundless fears and jealousies that their estate is bad. And of these doubts there are several occasions, the chief whereof I shall mention, by which we may judge of the rest that are of the like nature.

1st. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the *children of God*. This is so unreasonable that, if it were not a real cause of trouble to some persons, it did not deserve to be considered. For no man that sincerely endeavours to please God, and to keep his commandments, hath from scripture the least ground to suspect any latent or secret decree of God against him that shall work his ruin. But whatever the decrees of God be concerning the eternal state of man, since they are secret to us, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no man hath reason to think himself rejected of God, either from eternity or in time, that does not find the marks of reprobation in himself; I mean an evil heart and life. By this indeed a man may know, that he is out of God's favour for the present; but he hath no reason at all from hence to conclude, that God hath from all eternity and for ever cast him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords to him the space and means of it, is a much plainer sign that God is willing and ready to have mercy on him, than any thing else is, or can be, that God hath utterly cast him off. And therefore, for men to judge of their condition by the decrees of God, which are hid from us, and not by his words, which is *near us, and in our hearts*, is as if a man, wandering in the wide sea in a dark night, when the heaven is all clouded about, should yet resolve to steer his course by the stars, which he cannot see, but only guess at, and neglect the compass, which is at hand, and would afford him a much better and more certain direction. This therefore is to be rejected as a fond and groundless imaginati-

on, and which ought to trouble no body; because no body doth nor can know any thing concerning it. Moses hath long since very well determined this matter, Deut. xxix. 29. *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

2dly, Good men are conscious to themselves of many frailties and imperfections, and therefore they are afraid of their condition. But God considers the infirmities of our present state, and expects no other obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this state of imperfection is capable of: and provided the sincere endeavour and general course of our lives be to please him and keep his commandments, the terms of the gospel are so merciful, that our frailties shall not be imputed to us, so as to affect our main state, and to make us cease to be the children of God. And though we may be guilty of many errors and secret sins, which escape our notice and observation, yet it is not impossible for us to exercise such a repentance for these as will be available for their pardon. For we have to deal with a merciful God, who is pleased to accept of such an obedience and of such a repentance as we are capable of performing. Now, there is a great difference between those sins which require a particular repentance, before we can hope for the pardon of them (as all great, and deliberate, and presumptuous sins do, which are never committed without our knowledge; and are so far from slipping out of our memory, that they are continually flying in our faces, and we cannot forget them if we would), and sins of infirmity, occasioned by surprise, and violence of temptation, through ignorance or inadvertency: for a general repentance, such as we every day exercise in our devotions and prayers to God, may suffice for these. I speak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better; but to remove the groundless fears and jealousies of men about their main estate and condition. And if any ask, how I know that a general repentance will suffice for these kind of sins? I answer, Because more than this in many cases is impossible; so that either we must rest sa-



tified that God will forgive them upon these terms, or conclude that they shall not be forgiven at all; which is contrary to the whole tenor of the scriptures. I say, in many cases, more than this is impossible; because sins of ignorance, and those common errors and frailties of human life, which David calls *secret sins*, are not particularly known to us when they are committed; and consequently it is impossible that we should particularly repent of them. And therefore, in this case, there can be no doubt, but that God doth accept of a general repentance, as he did from David, when he made that humble confession and prayer to him, Psal. xix. 12. *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins.*

3dly, They are afraid their obedience is not sincere, because it proceeds many times from fear, and not always out of pure love to God. For answer to this: It is plain from scripture, that God propounds to men several motives and arguments to obedience; some proper to work upon their fear, as the threatenings of punishment; some upon their hopes, as the promises of blessing and reward; others upon their love, as the mercies and forgiveness of God. From whence it is evident he intended they should all work upon us. And accordingly the scripture gives us instances in each kind. *Noah, moved with fear, obeyed God in preparing an ark. Moses had respect unto the recompence of reward. Mary Magdalen loved much.* And as it is hard to say, so it is not necessary to determine, just how much influence, and no more, each of these hath upon us. It is very well, if men be reclaimed from their sins, and made good, by the joint force of all the considerations which God offers to us. To be sure, love is the noblest and most generous principle of obedience; but fear commonly takes the first and fastest hold of us, and, in times of violent temptation, is perhaps the best argument to keep, even the best of men, within the bounds of their duty.

4tly; Another cause of doubting in good men, is from a sense of their imperfect performance of the duties of religion, and of the abatement of their perfections towards God at some times. They have many wandering thoughts in prayer, and other exercises of devotion; and they cannot for their life keep their minds continually intent on  
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what they are about. This we should strive against, as much as we can; and that is the utmost we can do: but to cure this wholly, is impossible. The infirmity of our nature, and the frame of our minds, will not admit of it. And therefore no man ought to question his sincerity, because he cannot do that which is impossible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and religion at some times, this naturally proceeds from the inconstancy of mens tempers; by reason of which it is not possible that the best of men should be able always to maintain and keep up the same degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not measure mens sincerity by the tides of their affections, but by the constant bent of their resolutions, and the general tenor of their life and actions.

5thly, Another cause of these doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reasonable assurance of their good condition; some particular revelation from God, an extraordinary impression upon their minds to that purpose, which they think the scripture means by the *testimony*, and *seal*, and *earnest of the Spirit*. God may give this when, and to whom he pleases; but I do not find he hath any where promised it. And all that the scripture means by those phrases, of the *testimony*, and *seal*, and *earnest of the Spirit*, is, to my apprehension, no more but this, that the Holy Spirit which God bestowed upon Christians in so powerful and sensible a manner, was a seal and earnest of their resurrection to eternal life; according to that plain text, Rom. viii. 11. *If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you; he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* But then, who they are that have the Spirit of God, is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be led by the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and do not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, then the Spirit of God dwelleth in us. But this is very far from an immediate and extraordinary revelation from the Spirit of God to the minds of good men, telling them in particular, that they are the children of God. I know not what peculiar favour God may shew to some; but I know no such thing,

nor ever yet met with any wise and good man that did affirm it of himself: and I fear that in most of those who pretend to it, it is either mere fancy, or gross delusion.

6thly, As for the case of melancholy, it is not a reasonable case; and therefore doth not fall under any certain rules and directions. They who are under the power of it, are seldom fit to take that council which alone is fit to be given them; and that is, not to believe themselves concerning themselves, but to trust the judgment of others, rather than their own apprehensions. In other cases, every man knows himself best; but a melancholy man is most in the dark as to himself. This cause of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied, but hard to be removed, unless by physick or by time, or by chance. One may happen to say something that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and satisfy him for the present; but reason must needs signify very little to those persons, the nature of whose temper it is, to turn every thing that can be said for their comfort, into objections against themselves.

3. But, besides those who mistake their condition, either by presuming it to be better, or fearing it to be worse than it is, there are likewise others, who, upon good grounds, are doubtful of their condition, and have reason to be afraid of it; those I mean, who have some beginnings of goodness, which yet are very imperfect. They have good resolutions, and do many things well; but they often fall, and are frequently pulled back by those evil inclinations and habits, which are yet in a great measure unsubdued in them. These I cannot liken better than to the borderers between two countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, so that it is hard to say whose subjects they are, and to which prince they belong. Thus it is with many in religion: they have pious inclinations, and have made some fair attempts towards goodness; they have begun to refrain from sin, and to resist the occasions and temptations to it; but ever and anon they are mastered by their old lusts, and carried off from their best resolutions; and perhaps, upon a little consideration, they repent,  
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and recover themselves again; and, after a while, are again intangled and overcome.

Now, the case of these persons is really doubtful, both to themselves and others. And the proper direction to be given them, in order to their peace and settlement, is by all means to encourage them to go on and fortify their good resolutions; to be more vigilant and watchful over themselves; to strive against sin, and to resist it with all their might. And, according to the success of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up, and become more manifest. The more we grow in grace, and the seldomer we fall into sin, and the more even and constant our obedience to God is, so much the greater and fuller satisfaction we shall have of our good estate towards God: *for the path of the just, is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.*

I shall only make two or three inferences from what hath been discoursed upon this argument, and so conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of sins of omission as well as commission: *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.* The mere neglect of any of the great duties of religion, of piety towards God, and of kindness and charity to men, though we be free from the commission of great sins, is enough to cast us out of the favour of God, and to shut us for ever out of his kingdom: *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not: therefore depart, ye cursed.*

2. It is evident from what hath been said, that nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any course of sin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the children of God, and to hope for eternal life. The children of God will do the works of God; and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter, will endeavour to be like him here: *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifies himself, even as he is pure.*

3. You see what is the great mark and character of a man's good or bad condition: *Whosoever doth righteousness,*

ness, is of God; and whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God. Here is a plain and sensible evidence, by which every man, that will deal honestly with himself, may certainly know his own condition; and then, according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haste out of it. And we need not ascend into heaven, nor go down into the deep, to search out the secret counsels and decrees of God: there needs no anxious inquiry whether we be of the number of God's elect. If we daily mortify our lusts, and grow in goodness, and take care to add to our faith and knowledge, temperance, and patience, and charity, and all other Christian graces and virtues, we certainly take the best course in the world to *make our calling and election sure*. And without this it is impossible that we should have any comfortable and well-grounded assurance of our good condition. This one mark of *doing righteousness* is that into which all other signs and characters which are in scripture given of a good man, are finally resolved. And this answers all those various phrases which some men would make to be so many several and distinct marks of a *child of God*: as, whether we have the true knowledge of God, and divine illumination; for *hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*: whether we sincerely love God; for *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*: and whether God loves us; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright*: whether we be regenerate, and born of God; for *whosoever is born of God, sinneth not*: whether we have the *Spirit of God* witnessing with our spirits, that we are the children of God; for *as many as have the Spirit of God, are led by the Spirit, and by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh*: whether we belong to Christ, and have an interest in him or not; for *they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof*: in a word, whether the promise of heaven and eternal life belong to us; for *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*; but if we have our fruits unto holiness, the end will be everlasting life. So that you see at last, the scripture brings all this to one mark, holiness, and obedience to the laws of God, or a vitious and wicked life: *In this the children of God are manifest,*

*manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

Let us then deal impartially with ourselves, and bring our lives and actions to this trial, and never be at rest till the matter be brought to some issue, and we have made a deliberate judgment of our condition, whether we be the *children of God* or not: and if, upon a full and fair examination, our consciences give us this testimony, that by the grace of God we have *denied ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and have lived *soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world*; we may take joy and comfort in it; for *if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*. But if, upon the search and trial of our ways, our case appear clearly to be otherwise, or if we have just cause to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in so uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if we desire to know the way of peace, the scripture hath set it plainly before us: *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*. Though our case be very bad, yet it is not desperate: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*. And he is still willing to save us, if we be but willing to leave our sins, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*. We who have ventured so long upon the brink of ruin, may yet, by the infinite mercies of God, and by the power of his grace, be rescued from the base and miserable slavery of the devil and our lusts, *into the glorious liberty of the sons of God*.

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainness I could, to represent every man to himself, and to let him clearly see what his condition is towards God, and how the case of his soul and of his eternal happiness stands.

And

And I do verily believe, that what I have said in this matter is the truth of God, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up ourselves: for *great is truth, and mighty above all things*. She is faithful and impartial in her counsels; and though she be not always welcome, yet it is always wise to hearken to her; for in great kindness and charity she lets men know their condition, and the danger of it, that they may take care to prevent it: *With her is no accepting of persons, and in her judgment there is no unrighteousness*. I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a Heathen philosopher: "Make  
" it no longer a matter of dispute what are the marks  
" and signs of a good man, but immediately set about it,  
" and endeavour to become such an one," *Antonin. lib. 10.*

## S E R M O N XVI.

Of the joy which is in heaven at the repentance of a sinner.

LUKE XV. 7.

*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

**A**FTER many attempts made in vain to reclaim sinners from their evil ways, and to bring them to the wisdom of the just, it is hard for us, who are the messengers of God to men, not to sit down in despondence, and at last quite to despair of doing good upon them. But when I consider the infinite patience of God with sinners, and how long *his Spirit strives with them*, why should we, we who are sinners ourselves, think much to bear with sinners, and patiently to contend with their obstinacy and perverseness? When I consider that our blessed Saviour, the great preacher and pattern of righteousness, did not give over the worst of men, nor despair  
of



of their recovery; this methinks should make us, who are *ambassadors for Christ*, unwearied in *beseeching men in his stead to be reconciled to God.*

And of this we have a famous instance in this chapter. The publicans and sinners, as they had done several times before, came to hear our Saviour: he treated them very kindly, and conversed familiarly with them; at this the Pharisees were displeas'd, and murmured; and this unreasonable murmuring of theirs gave occasion to the three parables in this chapter.

In which our Saviour does at once answer the objection of the Pharisees, and give all possible encouragement to the repentance of these great sinners. He answers the Pharisees, by letting them plainly see, that he was about the best work in the world, the most acceptable to God, and matter of greatest joy to all the heavenly inhabitants. Instead of a severe reproof of their uncharitableness, he offers that calmly to their consideration, which ought in all reason to convince them, that he was noways to blame for this familiar conversation of his with sinners, having no other design upon them, but to reclaim them from their vices, and to make them fit company for the best of men; that he was a spiritual physician, and therefore his proper work and employment lay among his patients. And then, instead of terrifying these sinners, who seem'd to come with a good mind to be instructed by him, he gently insinuates the most winning arguments and the greatest encouragement to repentance; by shewing how ready God was, after all their sins and provocations, to receive them to his grace and favour, provided they did sincerely repent, and betake themselves to a better course; and not only so, but that the repentance of a sinner is a great joy to the great King of the world, and to all that holy and heavenly host that attend upon him.

From which method of our Saviour in treating so great sinners so gently, I cannot but make this observation, for my own use, as well as for others, That it is good to give, even the greatest of sinners, all the encouragement we can to repentance: and though men have been never so bad, yet if they have but this one good quality left in them, that they are patient to be instructed, and content to hear good counsel, we should use them kindly,  
and

and endeavour to recover them by the fairest means; not so much upbraiding them for their having been bad, as encouraging them to become better.

To this purpose our Saviour uttered three parables; of *the recovery of a lost sheep*; of *finding a lost piece of money*; of *the return of a prodigal son to his father*: and though they all aim at the same scope and design, yet our Saviour useth this variety, not only to convey the same thing to several capacities in a more acceptable manner, one similitude happening to hit one person, and another another; but likewise to inculcate so weighty a matter the more upon his hearers, and to fix it more deeply in their minds.

The words which I have read are the moral or application of the first parable, concerning a man who had an hundred sheep, and, having lost one, leaves the ninety and nine to go to seek that which was lost; and having found it, with great joy brings it home. By which our Saviour gives us to understand, what joy God and the blessed spirits above take in the conversion of a sinner: *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* Than which nothing could have been more proper, both to silence the uncharitable murmuring of the Pharisees against our Saviour for conversing with publicans and sinners, to so good an end, and likewise to encourage sinners to repent: for why should the Pharisees be displeas'd at that which was so great a pleasure to God and the holy angels? and what greater encouragement to repentance than this, that God is not only willing to receive the returning sinner, but that the news of his repentance is entertained in heaven with so much joy, that if it be possible for the blessed inhabitants of that place to have any thing added to their happiness, this will be a new accession to it?

There are three things in the words which require a very careful explication.

1. How we are to understand the joy that is in heaven at the conversion of a sinner?

2. Who are here meant by the *just persons, that need no repentance*?

3. With

3. With what reason it is here said, that there is *more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance?*

There is something of difficulty in each of these, which deserves our heedful and attentive consideration.

I. How we are to understand the *joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a sinner?* And this, as indeed this whole passage of our Saviour's, we are not to understand too strictly and rigorously, but as spoken in a great measure after the manner of men, and by way of accommodation to our capacity, so far as the persons here spoken of are capable of any addition to their joy and happiness.

As it refers to God, it seems very inconsistent with the happiness and perfection of the divine nature, to suppose him really capable of joy, any more than of grief, or any other passion; because this would be to imagine some new accession to his pleasure and happiness, which, being always infinite, can never have any thing added to it. And therefore we are to understand this as it relates to God, in the same manner as we do infinite other passages of scripture, where human passions are ascribed to him, to be spoken by way of condescension, and after the language and manner of the sons of men; and to signify only thus much to us, that the conversion of a sinner is a thing highly pleasing and acceptable to God.

As it refers to angels, and other blessed spirits, I see no inconvenience why it may not be understood more strictly and literally; that they conceive a new joy at the news of a sinner's repentance, and find a fresh pleasure and delight springing up in their minds, whenever they hear the joyful tidings of a sinner rescued from the slavery of the devil, and the danger of eternal damnation; of a new member added to the kingdom of God, that shall be a companion and sharer with them in that blessedness which they enjoy. There seems to me to be nothing in this repugnant to the nature and happiness of blessed spirits in another world. For it is certain, that there are degrees of happiness among the blessed: from whence it necessarily follows, that some of them may be happier than they are. And it is very probable, since the happiness of angels and good men is but finite, that

those who are most happy, do continually receive new additions to their blessedness; and that their felicity is never at a stand, but perpetually growing and improving to all eternity; and that as their knowledge and love do increase, so likewise the capacity and causes of their happiness are still more and more enlarged and augmented: so that it is reasonable enough to suppose, that there is really joy among the angels, and spirits of just men made perfect, over every sinner that repenteth.

II. Who are here meant by the *just persons who need no repentance*? That our Saviour, in this expression, gives some glance and reflexion upon the Pharisees, (who prided themselves in their own righteousness, and, instead of confessing their sins to God, stood upon their own justification, as if they needed no repentance) is very probable; because this parable was designed to answer their murmurings against him for conversing with publicans and sinners; and, by the by, to give a check to those who were so conceited of their own righteousness, as if they had no need of repentance. And this is very suitable to what our Saviour elsewhere says to them upon the like occasion, that *the whole have no need of the physician, but the sick; that he came not to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance*. But yet, though our Saviour expresseth himself so as that the Pharisees might with reason enough apply it to themselves, that there was more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine of them, who were so conceited of their own righteousness, that they thought they had no need of repentance, (for indeed our Saviour delivers himself so as to leave room for such a severe application;) yet I think there is little doubt to be made, but that he intended something farther: and that supposing the Pharisees were as just as they pretended, and were really righteous men, so as to stand in no need of such a repentance as great sinners do; yet our Saviour affirms, *there was more joy in heaven over one penitent sinner, than over ninety and nine such just persons*.

But are there any persons in the world so just, as absolutely to stand in need of no repentance? No; there was never any such person in the world, him only excepted who said this, our blessed Saviour, *who had no sin, nei-*  
*ther*

ther was guile found in his mouth. And therefore this phrase, of *needing no repentance*, is to be understood in a qualified sense, and with some allowance; otherwise our blessed Saviour had supposed a case which never was, of a great number of perfectly righteous men. And our Saviour's meaning in this is sufficiently explained in the last parable of this chapter, concerning the prodigal son; where the prodigal son is the *sinner that repented*, and his elder brother, who had always observed and obeyed his father, he is the *just person who needed no repentance*. So that by him our Saviour plainly designs those who, being religiously educated, and brought up in the fear of God, had never broke out into any extravagant and vicious course of life, and so in some sense had no need of repentance; that is, of changing the whole course of their lives, as the prodigal son had. Not but that the best of men are guilty of many faults and infirmities, which they have too much cause to repent of, as our Saviour sufficiently intimates in that parable. For certainly it was no small infirmity in the elder brother, to be so envious, and to take so heinously the joyful welcome and entertainment which his prodigal brother at his return found from his father: but yet this single fault, and sudden surprise of passion, considering the constant duty which he had paid to his father throughout the course of his life, did not make him such a sinner, as to need such a repentance as his brother did; which consisted in a perfect change of the whole course of his life. And of such *just persons* as these, and of such a *repentance* as this, it seems very plain that our Saviour intended this discourse.

III. But the main difficulty of all is, with what reason it is here said, that *there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance*? Is it not better not to offend, than to sin and repent? Is not innocence better than amendment, and the wisdom of prevention to be preferred before that of remedy? Is it worth the while to do amiss, to make way for repentance? And is not this almost like *sinning, that grace may abound*? And if repentance be not better than righteousness, why is there more joy in heaven over the penitent, than over the righteous; nay

over one penitent sinner, than over ninety and nine just persons? Do not the blessed always rejoice most in that which is really best? Here is the difficulty, and it requires some care and consideration clearly to remove it. In order to which, be pleased to consider these three things, which I think to be very material to the clearing of it.

1. That the same thing, considered in several respects, may in some respects have the advantage of another thing, and for those reasons be preferred before it; and yet not have the advantage of it absolutely, and in all respects. Moral comparisons are not to be exacted to a mathematical strictness and rigour. To this purpose I have observed, in a former discourse, that it was long since judiciously noted by Aristotle, "That moral and proverbial speeches are not to be taken too strictly, as if they were universally true, and in all cases:" it is sufficient if they be true for the most part, and in several respects which are very considerable. And of this nature are most of the proverbs of Solomon; and whosoever shall go about to make out the truth of them in all cases, does, in my opinion, take a very hard task upon himself. But, which is nearer to my purpose, our Saviour himself, in the chapter before my text, and in the moral application of a parable too, namely, that of the *unjust steward*, useth a proverbial speech just in the same manner: *The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*; which is only a wise observation that is generally true, and in many respects, but not absolutely and universally. For some men have been as wise and diligent for the glory of God, and interest of their souls, as ever any man was for this world, and for the advancement of his temporal interest. Of the like nature is this saying used by our Saviour, probably taken, as our Saviour did many other proverbial speeches, from the Jews, and applied to his own purpose. For there are several sayings of the Jewish masters much to this purpose: as, "Great is the dignity of penitents; Great is the virtue of them that repent, so that no creature may stand in their rank and order:" and again, "The righteous may not stand in the same place with those that have repented." These, I confess, were very high sayings; but yet very well designed for

for the encouragement of repentance. And they are not without good reason, as will appear, if we consider these two things.

1<sup>st</sup>, That the greater the difficulty of virtue is, so much the greater is the praise and commendation of it: and not only we ourselves take the more joy and comfort in it, but it is more admirable and delightful to others. Now, it cannot be denied to be much more difficult to break off a vitious habit, than to go on in a good way which we have been trained up in, and always accustomed to. Those that have been well educated, have great cause to thank God, and to acknowledge the care of their parents and teachers: for piety and goodness are almost infinitely easier to such persons, than to those who have wanted this advantage. It is happy for them they never tasted of unlawful pleasures; if they had, they would possibly have drank as deep as others. It is well they were never intangled in a sinful course, nor enslaved to vitious habits, nor *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*; if they had, they might possibly never have been recovered out of the snare of the devil. By the happiness of a good education, and the merciful providence of God, a great part of many mens virtue consists in their ignorance of vice; and their being kept out of the way of great and dangerous temptations; rather in the good customs they have been bred up to, than in the deliberate choice of their wills; and rather in the happy preventions of evil, than in their resolute constancy in that which is good. And God, who knows what is in man, and sees to the bottom of every man's temper and inclination, knows how far this man would have fallen, had he had the temptations of other men; and how irrecoverably perhaps he would have been plunged in an evil course, had he once entered upon it. So that repentance is a very great thing. And though it be the most just and fit, and reasonable thing in the world; yet, for all that, it deserves great commendation, because it is for the most part so very hard and difficult. And therefore, though, absolutely speaking, innocence is better than repentance; yet, as the circumstances may be, the virtue of some penitents may be greater than of many just and righteous persons.



2dly, There is this consideration farther to recommend repentance, that they who are reclaimed from a wicked course, are many times more thoroughly and zealously good afterwards. Their trouble and remorse for their sins, does quicken and spur them on in the ways of virtue and goodness; and a lively sense of their past errors, is apt to make them more careful and conscientious of their duty, more tender and fearful of offending God, and desirous, if it were possible, to redeem their former miscarriages by their good behaviour for the future. Their love to God is usually more vehement, and burns with a brighter flame; *for to whomsoever much is forgiven, they will love much.* And they are commonly more zealous for the conversion of others; as being more sensible of the danger sinners are in, and more apt to commiserate their case; remembering that it was once their own condition, and with what difficulty they were rescued from so great a danger. And for the most part great penitents are more free from pride, and contempt of others; the consideration of what themselves once were, being enough to keep them humble all their days. So that penitents are many times more thoroughly and perfectly good; and, after their recovery, do in several respects outstrip and excel those who were never engaged in a vitious course of life; as a broken bone that is well set, is sometimes stronger than it was before.

2. It will conduce also very much to the extenuating of this difficulty, to consider that our Saviour does not here compare repentance with absolute innocence and perfect righteousness; but with the imperfect obedience of good men, who are guilty of many sins and infirmities, but yet, upon account of the general course and tenor of their lives, are, by the mercy and favour of the gospel, esteemed just and righteous persons, and, for the merits and perfect obedience of our blessed Saviour, so accepted by God. Now, this alters the case very much, and brings the penitent, and this sort of righteous persons, much nearer to one another: so that, in comparing them together, the true penitent may in some cases, and in some respects, have the advantage of the righteous, and deserve upon some accounts to be preferred before him.

3. Which

3. Which is principally to be considered, for the full clearing of this difficulty; this passage of our Saviour is to be understood as spoken very much after the manner of men, and suitably to the nature of human passions, and the usual occasions of moving them. We are apt to be exceedingly affected with the obtaining of what we did not hope for, and much more with regaining of what we looked upon as lost and desperate. Whatever be the reason of it, such is the nature of man, that we are not so sensibly moved at the continuance of a good which we have long possessed, as at the recovery of it after it was lost, and gone from us. And the reasons of a judicious value and esteem of a settled pleasure and contentment are one thing, and the causes of sudden joy and transport another. A continued course of goodness may in itself be more valuable; and yet repentance after a great fall, and long wanderings, may be much more moving and surprising: for where things are constant, and keep in the same tenor, they are not apt, in their nature, to give any new and sudden occasion of joy. And this is the reason given in the parable of the prodigal son; where the father tells his eldest son, who was so offended at the joyful reception and welcome of his prodigal brother, that *he had been always with him, and all that he had was his*: that is, he was sensible of his constant duty and obedience, than which nothing could have been more acceptable; and that it had not, nor should not lose its reward: but the return of his other son, after he had given over all hopes of him, and looked upon his case as desperate, this was a marvellous surprise, and a happiness beyond expectation; which is the proper and natural cause of joy and gladness: and therefore he tells him, that, upon such an occasion, *it was meet, that we should make merry; and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.* His elder son's continuance in his duty, was the enjoyment of what he always had; but the return of his prodigal son, was the retrieving of what he had given up for lost, and a kind of resurrection from the dead. And thus our blessed Saviour, to encourage the repentance of sinners, represents God after the manner of men; as if our heavenly Father did conceive such a joy upon the repentance

ance of a sinner, as earthly parents are wont to do upon the return of a wild and extravagant son, to himself and his duty.

Having thus, as briefly and clearly as I could, explained the several difficulties in the text, I shall now deduce some inferences from it; and so conclude.

1. That the blessed spirits above have some knowledge of the affairs of men here below; because they are said to rejoice at the conversion of a sinner. This is spoken more particularly of the angels; as appears by comparing what is more generally said in the text, that *there is joy in heaven*, with what is more particularly expressed in the 10th verse, that *there is joy in the presence of the angels, over one sinner that repenteth*. Now, whether the angels come to this knowledge by virtue of their ministry here below for the good of the elect, and so, in their continual intercourse between heaven and earth, bring to their fellow-servants in heaven the joyful news of the repentance of sinners upon earth; or whether God be pleased from time to time to reveal it to them, as a thing extremely welcome and delightful to good spirits, and tending to the increase of their happiness; as it is not very material to inquire, so perhaps impossible for us to determine.

However, it cannot from hence be concluded, that the angels or saints in heaven have such an universal knowledge of our condition and affairs, as to be a reasonable ground and warrant to us to pray to them, yea, or to desire them to pray for us; no, tho' this were done without any solemn circumstances of invocation: for they may very well know some things concerning us, wherein their own comfort and happiness is likewise concerned, and yet be ignorant of all the rest of our affairs. This one thing we are sure they know, because our Saviour hath told us so; but we are sure of no more. And there is neither equal reason for their knowledge of our other concernments, nor is there any revelation in scripture to that purpose.

2. If God, and the blessed spirits above, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, so should we too; and not fret and murmur; as the Pharisees here did. This is the temper of the devil, and of very bad men, to regret and  
envy

envy the good and happiness of others. For it is reasonable to believe, that proportionable to the joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a sinner, is the grief and vexation of the devil and his instruments, of evil spirits and wicked men. And as the devil delights in destroying souls, and goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; so, no doubt, he is in great rage, and gnasheth out of very discontent, when at any time he is frustrated of his hopes, and the prey, which he thought himself sure of, is snatched out of his jaws. And thus we see it is with bad men: they do persecute those that forsake them and their wicked ways, and refuse to go along with them *to the same excess of riot.*

And this is no where more visible, than among those of the church of Rome. How full of wrath and indignation are they against those who, out of pure conviction of the errors and corruptions of their church, come over to ours? How do they persecute them with slanders and reproaches, and with all the effects of hatred and malice? So that many times they can scarce refrain from doing them a real mischief, even where it is dangerous to themselves to attempt it; as if they envied them the grace of God, and the opportunity of being saved.

I know it is too natural to those of all communions, to be eager and fierce against those that desert them: and yet, supposing they had the truth certainly on their side, which they cannot all have, I see no great reason for this temper and carriage; for why should I cast away my patience, and my charity, because another man hath made shipwreck of his faith? But I do not remember any where among mankind to have observed a more implacable malice, a more sincere and hearty ill-will, than they of the church of Rome do constantly express towards those that forsake them: nay, though they give never so modest and reasonable an account of their change, and behave themselves towards their old friends with all the kindness and compassion in the world; yet their hatred and indignation against them runs so high, that one may plainly see, they would sooner forgive a man the greatest sins that human nature can be guilty of, and the breach of all the ten commandments, than this one crime of leav-  
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ing their church; that is, in truth of growing wiser and better.

3. The consideration of what hath been said, should mightily inflame our zeal, and quicken our industry and diligence for the conversion of sinners: for if the conversion of one soul be worth so much labour and pains, and matter of such joy to the blessed God and good spirits, what pains should not we take, in so corrupt and degenerate an age as this of ours; where impenitent sinners do so much abound, and the just are almost failed from among the children of men?

Our blessed Saviour indeed, according to the extraordinary decency of all his parables, puts the case very charitably, and lays the supposition quite on the other side. If there were but one sinner in the world, or but one of a hundred; yet we should very zealously intend, and with all our might, the reduction of this one lost sheep; and should never be at rest, till this single wandering soul were found, and saved. But God knows this is not our case, but quite otherwise; which should quicken our endeavours so much the more, and make us bestir ourselves to the utmost; having always in our minds that admirable saying of St. James, *He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death.* He that knows the value of an immortal soul, and how fearful a thing it is to perish everlastingly, can think no pains too much to take to *save a soul from death.*

4. Lastly, What an argument and encouragement is here to repentance, even to the greatest of sinners? They, I am sure, stand most in need of it: and though they of all others have the least reason to look for mercy; yet they shall not be refused: though they be like the publicans and Heathens among the Jews, who were not only reputed, but many times really were the worst of men; though, like the prodigal son here in the parable, they have run away from their father, and wasted their estate in lewd and riotous courses; yet, whenever they come to themselves, and are willing to return to their father, to acknowledge their folly, and repent of it, he is ready to receive them; nay much more ready to receive them, than they can be to come to him. For when the prodigal was but coming towards his father, and was  
yet

yet afar off, the father runs to meet him, and embraceth him with as much kindness as if he had never offended him, and entertains him with more joy than if he had always continued with him.

How does the great God condescend to encourage our repentance, representing himself and all the blessed company of heaven as transported with joy at the conversion of a sinner, and almost setting a greater value upon repentance, than even upon innocence itself? And if our heavenly Father, who hath been so infinitely offended, and so highly provoked by us beyond all patience, be so ready, so forward, so glad to receive us, and there be no hinderance, no difficulty, no discouragement on his part; is it possible, after all this, that we can be such fools, and such enemies to ourselves, as to be backward to our own happiness! All of us, the best of us, have too much cause for repentance; and I fear too many of us stand in need of that repentance intended by our Saviour in the text, which consists in the change of our whole lives.

But I will not upbraid you with your faults; having no design to provoke, but only to persuade men. I leave it to every one's conscience, to tell him how great a sinner, how grievous an offender he hath been. God knows, we take no pleasure in mentioning the sins of men, but only in their amendment; and we would, if it were possible, even without minding them how bad they have been, persuade and encourage them to be better.

It is but a small consideration, to tell you how much it would cheer and comfort our hearts, and quicken our zeal and industry for the salvation of souls, to see some fruit of our labours; that all our pains are not lost, and that all the good counsel that is from hence tendered to you, is not like rain falling upon the rocks, and showers upon the sands.

But I have much greater considerations to offer to you; that your repentance will at once rejoice the heart of God, and angels, and men; that it is a returning to a right mind, and the restoring of you to yourselves, to the ease and peace of your own consciences, and to a capacity of being everlastingly happy; that it is to take pity  
upon

upon yourselves and your poor immortal souls; and to take due care to prevent that which is to be dreaded above all things, the being miserable for ever: and, last of all, that, if thou wilt not repent now, the time will certainly come, and that perhaps in this life, when you shall see the greatest need of repentance; and yet perhaps, with miserable Esau, *find no place for it, though you seek it carefully with tears; when you shall cry, Lord, Lord, and the door shall be shut against you; and shall seek to enter, but shall not be able.* To be sure, in the other world you shall eternally repent to no purpose, and be continually lamenting your wretched condition without hopes of remedy; for *there shall be weeping and wailing without effect, without intermission, and without end.*

And what cause have we to thank God that this is not yet our case; that we are yet on this side the pit of destruction, and the gulph of despair? O the infinite patience and boundless goodness of God to sinners! With what clemency hath he spared us, and *suffered our manners thus long?* And with what kindness and concernment does he still call upon us to leave our sins, and to return to him, as if, in so doing, we should make him happy, and not ourselves? With what earnest longings and desires doth he wait and wish for our repentance, saying, *O that there were such a heart in them! O that they would hearken unto my voice! when shall it once be?* Thus God is represented in scripture, as patiently attending and listening what effect his admonitions and counsels, his reproofs and threatenings, will have upon sinners, Jer. viii. 6. *I hearkened and I heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*

And is not this our case? God hath long waited for our repentance; and once a-year we solemnly pretend to set about it: but many of us hitherto, I fear, instead of returning to God, have but more blindly and furiously run on in our course, *like the horse that has no understanding; yea, in this more brutish than the beast, that he rusheth into the battle without any consideration of death or danger, and destroys himself without a syllogism.*

But



But we sinners have reason, and yet are mad. The greatest part of evil doers are sufficiently sensible of the danger of their course, and convinced that eternal misery and ruin will be the end of it; and yet, I know not how, they make a shift, upon one pretence or other, to discourse and reason themselves into it.

But, because *the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword*, and comes with a greater weight and force upon the minds of men than any human persuasion whatsoever, I will conclude all with those short and serious counsels and exhortations of God to sinners by his holy prophets.

*Consider, and shew yourselves men, O ye transgressors. Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee. Seek the Lord while he may be found: call upon him while he is near. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.*

## S E R M O N XVII.

### Of the sin against the Holy Ghost.

MATTH. xii. 31. 32.

*Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*

**T**H E occasion of these words of our blessed Saviour was, the blasphemy of the Pharisees against that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and particularly did cast out devils. Which works of his, though they were wrought by the Spirit of God, yet they obstinately and maliciously imputed them to the power of the devil. Upon which our Saviour takes oc-

caſion to declare the danger of the ſin which he calls *blaſpheming of the Holy Ghost*; and tells them, that this was ſo great a ſin above all other, that it is in a peculiar manner unpardonable: *Wherefore I ſay unto you, &c.*

For the explaining of theſe words, and the nature and unpardonableneſs of this ſin, we will inquire into theſe four things.

1. What is the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man*, and *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghost*?

2. Wherein the nature of this ſin, or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghost, doth conſiſt?

3. In what ſenſe this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly unpardonable? And,

4. Upon what account it is ſo?

I. What is the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man*, and *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghost*? The reaſon of this inquiry is, becauſe the text plainly puts a great difference between them, tho' it be not obvious to diſcern where it lies. For our Saviour tells us, that *whoſoever ſpeaks a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghost, it ſhall never be forgiven him*: and yet this blaſphemy of the Pharifees againſt the Holy Ghost was ſpeaking againſt the Son of man. For to ſay he caſt out devils by the power of the devil, though it was a blaſpheming of the Holy Ghost, by whoſe power he wrought theſe miracles; yet it was likewiſe a blaſpheming of Chriſt himſelf; and was in effect to ſay, that he was no true prophet, nor did come from God, but was a magician and impoſtor.

For the removing of this difficulty, I ſhall not need to ſay, as ſome learned men have done, that by *the Son of man* is here to be underſtood any man, and that our Saviour is not particularly deſigned by it: That ſeems very hard, when our Saviour is ſo frequently in the goſpel called *the Son of man*: and eſpecially when St. Luke, reciting theſe words, does immediately before give him this very title, to put the matter out of all doubt, Luke, xii. 8. 9. 10. *Alſo I ſay unto you, Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him ſhall the Son of man alſo confeſs before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men, ſhall be denied before the angels of God.* Upon which it follows,

follows, *And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him.* So that in all reason the Son of man is the very same person that had this title given him in the foregoing words, *viz.* our blessed Saviour. So that I take it for granted, that by *speaking against the Son of man* is here meant speaking against Christ; and by speaking against him, as it is opposed to speaking against the Holy Ghost, is meant all those reproaches and contumelies which they cast upon our Saviour's person, without reflecting upon that divine power which he testified by his miracles: as, their reproaching him with the meanness of his birth, *Is not this the carpenter's son?* with the place of it, as they supposed, *Out of Gallilee ariseth no prophet:* their reflecting upon his life, saying that he was a *wine-bibber, and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners:* with many other calumnies which they maliciously cast upon him.

But by *speaking against the Holy Ghost* is meant their blaspheming and reproaching that divine power whereby he wrought his miracles; which though it did at last likewise reflect upon our Saviour's person, yet it was an immediate reflection upon the Holy Ghost, and a blaspheming of him: and therefore it is called *speaking against the Holy Ghost*, by way of distinction or opposition to the other calumnies which they used against our Saviour; which were proper blasphemies and reproaches of his person, but not of the Holy Ghost also, as this was. This seems to me to be the true difference here intended by our Saviour, between *speaking against the Son of man*, and *speaking against the Holy Ghost.* Let us, in the

II. Second place, inquire wherein the nature of this sin, or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, doth consist. And the true nature of this sin, though it be so plainly to be gathered from our Saviour's description of it, yet, I know not how, a great many learned men have made a hard shift to mistake it. Some have made it to be final impenitency, because that is unpardonable. But why that, rather than any thing else that is bad, should be called a blaspheming of the Holy Ghost, it is hard to give a reason. Others have placed the nature of it in a wilful and obstinate opposition of the truth: which, though it be a great sin, and included in the sin here spoken of, or a

concomitant of it; yet there is great reason to believe that this is not all that is here meant by it. Others would have it to consist in a malicious opposition of the truth, when men know and are convinced that it is the truth. Which is a great sin indeed, if ever any man were guilty of it. But it is a great question whether human nature be capable of it. A man may indeed have sufficient means of conviction, and yet not be convinced; but it is hardly imaginable, that a man should oppose the truth, when he is actually convinced that it is the truth. And, to mention no more, others think it to consist in a renouncing of the truth for fear of suffering; which made Francis Spira to think that he had committed this sin.

But, with all due respect to the judgment of others, I cannot think that any of these is the sin our Saviour here describes; as I shall endeavour plainly to shew, by considering the occasion of our Saviour's mentioning of it, the persons upon whom our Saviour chargeth this sin, and upon what account he chargeth them with it.

At the 22d verse of this chapter, there was brought to our Saviour *one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him*. Upon this *the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?* that is, the Messias. The Pharisees hearing this, with great bitterness and contempt said, *This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils*. Upon this our Saviour represents to them the unreasonableness of this calumny; and that upon these two considerations. 1. That it was very unlikely that the devil should lend him this power to use it against himself: *Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself, shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?* 2. Our Saviour tells them, they might with as much reason attribute all miracles to the devil. There were those among themselves who cast out devils in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; as Origen, and Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, tells us. Of these our Saviour speaks, and asks the Pharisees, *by what power they cast them out?* But they acknowledged, that these did it by the power of God; and there was no cause, but their malice, why they should not have acknowledged that

that he did it likewise by the same power ; v. 27. *If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out ? therefore they shall be your judges ;* that is, this may be sufficient to convince you of malice to me. *But if I cast out devils by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you ;* that is, the Messias is come, because he wrought these and other miracles to prove that he was the Messias. And then it follows, *Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men ; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

So that the Pharisees are the persons charged with this sin, or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. And their blasphemy was plainly this, that when he cast out devils by the Spirit of God, they said he did it by the power of the devil : they maliciously ascribed these works of the Holy Ghost to the devil.

And that this is the ground why our Saviour chargeth them with this sin against the Holy Ghost, is yet more plain from St. Mark, Mark iii. 28. 29. 30. *Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme : but he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation : because they said, He hath an unclean spirit ;* that is, because the Pharisees charged him to be a magician, and to have a familiar spirit, by whose assistance he did these works ; when in truth he did them by the Spirit of God : therefore our Saviour declares them guilty of this sin of blaspheming the Holy Ghost, which should never be forgiven.

So that the nature of this sin did consist in a most malicious opposition to the utmost evidence that could be given to the truth of any religion. Our blessed Saviour, to shew that he was sent by God, and came from him, wrought miracles, such as did plainly evidence a divine power and presence accompanying him. For in St. Luke he is said to do them *by the finger of God*, Luke xi. 20. *By the finger of God ;* that is, to do such things as were undeniable evidence of the divine power and presence. And this is the utmost testimony that God ever gave to any person that was sent by him. And the Pharisees were

eye-witnesses of those miracles which our Saviour wrought; so that they could not deny them; yet such was their opposition to him and his doctrine, that tho' they saw these things done by him, and could not deny the reality of them, yet, rather than they would own him to be the Messiah, and his doctrine to come from God, they most maliciously and unreasonably ascribed them to the power of the devil. And this was the blasphemy which they were guilty of against the Holy Ghost. And herein lay the greatness of their sin, in resisting the evidence of those miracles which were so plainly wrought by the Holy Ghost; and which, tho' themselves saw, yet they maliciously imputed them to the devil, rather than they would be convinced by them. And this is so very plain, that hardly any man that considers our Saviour's discourse upon this occasion, can otherwise determine the nature of this sin; especially if we do but attend to those remarkable words which I cited before, Mark iii. 29. *But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.* I come now to the

III. Third thing I propounded, namely, In what sense this sin is here said to be peculiarly unpardonable? for this sin our Saviour positively affirms to be in this different from all other sins, that it is capable of no pardon: *I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.* And to shew what he means by the not forgiving of it, he tells us, that eternal punishment shall follow it in the other world: *Whoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* Which St. Mark expresseth more plainly, that it shall bring those who are guilty of it to eternal damnation, Mark iii. 29. *He that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is liable to eternal damnation.* So that when our Saviour says, *it shall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come,* he does not intend to insinuate, that some sins which are not forgiven in this world, may be forgiven in the other; but in these words

words he either alludes to the opinion of the Jews concerning the effect of the highest excommunication, the sentence whereof they held not to be reverfible, neither in this world, nor the other; or elfe the reason of this expreffion may probably be, to meet with a common and falfe opinion amongst the Jews, which was, that fome fins which are not pardoned to men in this life, may by facrifices be expiated in the other; and therefore he fays, it fhall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor the other; and St. Mark more plainly, that thofe who are guilty of it, fhall *never have forgivenefs, but be liable to eternal damnation.* So that our Saviour's meaning feems plainly to be this, that this fin is altogether incapable of forgivenefs. I know fome have endeavoured to mollify this matter, but I think without fufficient reason. Grotius underftands the words comparatively, that any fort of fin fhall fooner be forgiven, than this fin againft the Holy Ghofit; and that our Saviour only intended to exprefs the greatnefs and heinoufnefs of this fin above others, in which refpect the pardon of it would be more difficult than of any other fin; but yet that the cafe of fuch a perfon is not abfolutely desperate. But if our Saviour had intended to fay, that this fin was abfolutely unpardonable, I would fain know how could he have expreffed the matter in higher and fuller words? Dr. Hammond mollifies the words another way, that this fin fhall never be pardoned, but upon a particular repentance for it: as if our Saviour's meaning was, that a general repentance, which was fufficient for fins of ignorance, would not be fufficient in this cafe; but there muft be a particular repentance for it, without which it would never be pardoned. But this is by no means agreeable to the fcope of our Saviour's difcourfe; becaufe he plainly intends to difference this from all other forts of fins: *I fay unto you, All manner of fin and blafphemy fhall be forgiven unto men.* But, according to this interpretation, our Saviour muft mean, that all other fins would be forgiven upon a general repentance: which is not true: for there are many other fins befides fins of ignorance; there are wilful and heinous fins, fuch as wilful murder, and adultery, and blafphemy, that only excepted which is againft the Holy Ghofit, and the like grofs fins, which all divines hold, fhall not

be



be forgiven, but upon a particular repentance. So that this interpretation does not sufficiently difference this sin from all other sorts of sins, which, it is yet very plain, our Saviour intended to do. It remains then, that these words must in all reason be understood absolutely, that the persons that are guilty of this great sin, shall never have it forgiven unto them. And it may be this will not seem so harsh, when we have considered, in the

IV. Fourth place, How it comes to pass that this sin is above all others incapable of pardon? and that upon these two accounts.

1. Because, by this sin, men resist their last remedy, and oppose the best and utmost means of their conviction. What can God be imagined to do more, to convince a man of a divine revelation, or of the truth of any doctrine or message that comes from him, than to work miracles to this purpose? and what greater assurance can men have that miracles are wrought, than to be eye-witnesses of them themselves? and if men will resist such evidence, what can God do more for their satisfaction? If, when men see plain miracles wrought, they will say, that it is not the power of God that does them, but the power of the devil; and if, when men see the devils cast out, they will say that the devil conspires against himself: this is to outface the sun at noon-day, and there is no way left to convince such perverse persons of the truth of any divine revelation. So that there is no remedy but such persons must continue in their opposition to the truth. For this is such a sin, as does in its own nature shut out and prevent all remedy. And he that thus perversely and maliciously opposeth the truth, must upon the same grounds unavoidably continue in his opposition to it; because there is nothing left to be done for his conviction, more than is already done. If God should send a person immediately from heaven to him to convince him of his error, he can give him no greater testimony that he comes from God than miracles: and if, when God enables that person to work these by the power of his Spirit, this man will obstinately impute them to the power of the devil, he defeats all the imaginable means of his own conviction. So that it is no wonder if that sin be unpardonable, which resists the last and utmost means  
which

which God hath ever yet thought fit to use to bring men to repentance and salvation. And if God were willing to reveal himself, and the way to pardon and salvation, to such a one, he doth by this very temper and disposition render himself incapable of being satisfied and convinced concerning any divine revelation.

2. Because this sin is of that high nature, that God is therefore justly provoked to withdraw his grace from such persons; and it is probable resolved so to do; without which grace they will continue impenitent. There is no doubt but God, if he will, can work so powerfully upon the minds of men by his grace and Spirit, as to convince the most obstinate; and supposing them to be convinced, and repent, it cannot be denied but that they would be forgiven. And therefore, when our Saviour here says they shall not be forgiven, it is reasonable to suppose that he means, that, when persons are come to that degree of obstinacy and malice, God will, as justly he may, withdraw his grace from them: *His Spirit will not strive with them*, to overcome their obstinacy, but will leave them to the bias of their own perverse and malicious minds; which will still engage them in a farther opposition to the truth, and finally sink them into perdition. So that, being deserted by God, and for want of the necessary help and aid of his grace, justly withdrawn from them, continuing finally impenitent, they become incapable of forgiveness, both in this world, and that which is to come. And there is nothing that can seem harsh or unreasonable in this, to those who grant, as I think all men do, that God may be so provoked by men as justly to withdraw his grace from them in this life, that grace which is necessary to their repentance. And surely, if any provocation be likely to do it, this cannot be denied to be of all others the greatest, obstinately and maliciously to oppose the utmost evidence that God ever gave to the truth of any doctrine revealed by him. And of this the Pharisees, who are here charged with this sin against the Holy Ghost, were notoriously guilty, in resisting the clear evidence of our Saviour's miracles.

And thus I have done with the four things I propounded to enquire into from these words, namely, the difference between *speaking against the Son of man*, and  
*speaking*

*speaking against the Holy Ghost*; wherein the nature of this sin, or blaiphemy against the Holy Ghost, does consist; and in what sense this sin is said to be unpardonable; and upon what account it is so; namely, because men by this sin resist their last remedy, and oppose the best and utmost means of their conviction; and because it may reasonably be supposed, that, upon a provocation of this high nature, God may, and is resolved to withdraw that grace from such persons which is necessary to their repentance, without which their sin remains for ever unpardonable.

All that now remains is, to make this discourse some way or other useful to ourselves. And it may very well serve to these two purposes. 1. To comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair, out of an apprehension that they have committed this sin. 2. To caution others against the approaches to it.

1. To comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair, upon an apprehension that they have committed this great and unpardonable sin; and consequently are utterly incapable of ever being restored to the mercy and favour of God. And nothing can be more for the comfort of such persons, than to understand aright what the nature of this sin is, and wherein the heinousness of it doth consist; which I have endeavoured to manifest. And if this be the nature of it which I have declared, as it seems very plain that it is, then I cannot see how any person now is likely to be in those circumstances as to be capable of committing it. And being a sin of so heinous a nature, and declared by our Saviour to be absolutely unpardonable, there is no reason to extend it beyond the case to which our Saviour applies it; which was, the resisting of the evidence of the miracles which were wrought for the truth of Christianity by those who were eye-witnesses of them; that is, by those who had the utmost assurance of them that human nature is capable of: and not only a bare resistance of that evidence, but with a very malicious circumstance, so as to impute those works which were wrought by the Holy Ghost, to the power of the devil. This was the case of the Pharisees, whom our Saviour chargeth with this sin. And no body hath warrant to extend this sin any farther than this case: and

and without good warrant, it would be the most uncharitable thing in the world to extend it farther.

That which comes nearest to it, both in the heinousness of the crime. and the unpardonableness of it, is total apostasy from Christianity, after the embracing of it, and full conviction of the truth of it. And this the scripture seems to place, if not in the same rank, yet very near to it. And of this the Apostle speaks very often in the epistle to the Hebrews under the name of *unbelief*, and *sin*, by way of eminence, as being the great sin that Christians were in danger of falling into, called in that epistle (Heb. xii. 1.) ἡ ἐν περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν, the sin which Christians, by reason of the circumstances they were then in, were especially subject to: and he parallels it with the case of the Jews in the wilderness, concerning whom God sware that they should not enter into his rest, namely, the earthly Canaan, which was a type of heaven, chap. iii. 18. and chap. vi. 4. 5. 6. more expressly: *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they should fall away, to renew them again to repentance: where, by impossible, the least that can be meant is, that it is extremely difficult for such persons to recover themselves by repentance.* And it is observable, that those persons are said to have been *partakers of the Holy Ghost*; by which is meant, that they were endued with a power of miracles by the Holy Ghost, or were under the conviction of them, as having seen them wrought by others. So that this apostasy may be said in that respect to be a sin against the Holy Ghost. So likewise, chap. x. 26. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, (that is, if we apostatise from Christianity after we have embraced the profession of it, as appears plainly from the scope of the Apostle's discourse) there remains no more sacrifice for sin:* which expression declares this sin either to be unpardonable, or something very like it. And, at the 29th verse, those persons are said to *tread under foot the Son of God, and to do despite unto the Spirit of grace;* which signifies, that the sin there spoken of is more immediately committed against the Holy Spirit of God. St.

Peter likewise declares the great danger of this sin, 2 Pet. ii. 20. *If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again intangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.* St. John likewise seems to speak of this sin of apostasy, and to call it *a sin unto death*; discouraging Christians rather from praying for those who were fallen into it; which gives great suspicion, that he looked upon it as hardly pardonable: 1 John v. 16. *If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for those that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.* Now, that by the *sin unto death*, the Apostle here means apostasy from the Christian religion to the Heathen idolatry, seems extremely probable from what follows, v. 18. *We know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not;* that is, he preserveth himself from idolatry, which the devil had seduced the world into: v. 19. *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, in the wicked one;* that is, under the power of the devil: *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding to know him that is true;* that is, to distinguish between the true God and idols. And then it follows, *This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* Which last caution is a key to the understanding of all the rest; and makes it very probable; that the *sin unto death* is apostasy from Christianity unto idolatry: otherwise it is hard to imagine, how the last clause comes in, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* And this is that sin which of all others approacheth nearest to this sin against the Holy Ghost which our Saviour speaks of, and concerning the pardonableness of which the scripture seems to speak very doubtfully. But if it were of the same unpardonable nature, yet this can be no trouble to those persons I am speaking of, who cannot but know themselves to be far enough from the guilt of this sin.

As for those other sins which by some are taken to be the sins against the Holy Ghost, they are either such as perhaps

perhaps no man is capable of committing, as a malicious opposition to the truth, when I am convinced and know it to be the truth: for this seems to be a contradiction, to know any thing to be the truth, and to believe it to be so, and yet to oppose it; because the understanding can no more oppose truth as truth, than the will can refuse good as good: or else, they are such as no man can know he is guilty of in this life; as final impenitency, which supposeth a man to live and die without repentance: or else such as I think no good man is incident to; as a malicious and perverse opposing of the truth after sufficient means of conviction. However, none of these are that which the scripture describes to be the sin against the Holy Ghost; as I have already shewn.

But still there are two things which usually trouble honest and well-meaning persons; but are rather the effects of melancholy, than any reasonable ground of trouble. Some think that every deliberate sin against knowledge, and after conviction, is the sin against the Holy Ghost. This is acknowledged to be a very great aggravation of sin, and such as calls for a great and particular repentance; but does by no means render a man incapable of forgiveness. Others are troubled with blasphemous thoughts; and those they think to be the sin against the Holy Ghost. But this is generally the mere effect of melancholy; and the persons that are troubled with these black thoughts, are no ways consenting to them; but they rise in their minds perfectly against their wills, and without any approbation of theirs: and in this case they are so far from being the unpardonable sin, that I hope, yea and verily believe, they are no sins at all, but the mere effects of a bodily distemper; and no more imputed to us, than the wild and idle ravings of a man in a frenzy or a fever. And God forbid that the natural effects of a bodily disease should bring guilt upon our souls. So that these persons have reason enough for comfort; but the misery is, their present distemper renders them incapable of it.

2. The other use I would make of this discourse is, to caution men against the degrees and approaches of this sin. For if the sin against the Holy Ghost be of such a high nature, and so unpardonable, then all approaches to

it are very dreadful: such as are, profane scoffing at religion, and the Holy Spirit of God which dwells in good men; abuse of the holy scriptures, which were indited by the spirit of God; perverse infidelity, notwithstanding all the evidence which we have for the truth of Christianity, and sufficient assurance of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, brought down to us by credible history, though we were not eye-witnesses of them; obstinacy in a sinful and vitious course, notwithstanding all the motives and arguments of the gospel to persuade men to repentance; sinning against the clear conviction of our consciences, and the motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit to the contrary; malicious opposing of the truth, when the arguments for it are very plain and evident to any impartial and unprejudiced mind, and when he that opposeth the truth, hath no clear satisfaction in his own mind to the contrary, but suffers himself to be furiously and headily carried on in his opposition to it. These are all sins of a very high nature, and of the nearest affinity with this great and unpardonable sin, of any that can easily be instanced in. And though God, to encourage the repentance of men, has not declared them unpardonable; yet they are great provocations; and if they be long continued in, we know not how soon God may withdraw his grace from us, and suffer us to be *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Be ready then to entertain the truth of God, whenever it is fairly propounded to thee, and with such evidence as thou art willing to accept in other matters, where thou hast no prejudice nor interest to the contrary. Do nothing contrary to thy known duty; but be careful in all things to obey the convictions of thine own conscience, and to yield to the good motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, who works secretly upon the minds of men, and inspires us many times gently with good thoughts and inclinations, and is grieved when we do not comply with them, and, after many repulses, will at last withdraw himself from us, and leave us to be assaulted by the temptations of the devil, and to be hurried away by our own lusts into ruin and perdition.



## S E R M O N XVIII.

The example of Jesus in doing good.

ACTS x. 38.

—Who went about doing good.

WHEN almighty God designed the reformation of the world, and the restoring of man to the image of God, the pattern after which he was first made, he did not think it enough to give us the most perfect laws of holiness and virtue; but hath likewise set before us a living pattern, and a familiar example, to excite and encourage us, to go before us, and shew us the way, and as it were to lead us by the hand, in the obedience of those laws. Such is the sovereign authority of God over men, that he might, if he had pleased, have only given us a law written with his own hand, as he did to the people of Israel from mount Sinai: but such is his goodness, that he had sent a great ambassador from heaven to us, *God manifested in the flesh*, to declare and interpret his will and pleasure; and not only so, but to fulfil that law himself, the observation whereof he requires of us. The bare rules of a good life are a very dead and ineffectual thing, in comparison of a living example; which shews us the possibility and practicableness of our duty; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Religion indeed did always consist in an imitation of God, and in our resemblance of those excellencies which shine forth in the best and most perfect being; but we may imitate him now with much greater ease and advantage, since God was pleased to become man, on purpose to shew us how men may become like to God. And this is one great end for which the Son of God came into the world, and *was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, and conversed so long and familiarly with mankind, that, in his own person and life, he might give us the example of all that holi-

ness and virtue which his laws require of us. And as he was in nothing liker the Son of God, than in being and doing good; so is he in nothing a fitter pattern for our imitation, than in that excellent character given of him here in the text, that *he went about doing good*.

In which words two things offer themselves to our consideration.

1. Our Saviour's great work and business in the world, which was, to *do good*; *ὁς διήλθεν ἐν ἐργασίῳ*, who employed himself in being a benefactor to mankind. This refers more especially to his healing the bodily diseases and infirmities of men: *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*; intimating to us, by this instance of his doing good, that he who took so much pains to rescue mens bodies from the power and possession of the devil, would not let their souls remain under his tyranny. But, though the text instanceth only in one particular, yet this general expression of *doing good* comprehends all those several ways whereby he was beneficial to mankind.

2. Here is his diligence and industry in this work: *He went about doing good*; he made it the great business and constant employment of his life.

I shall propound to you the pattern of our Saviour in both these particulars.

1. His great work and business in the world was, to *do good*; the most pleasant and delightful, the most happy and glorious work in the world. It is a work of a large extent, and of an universal influence; and comprehends in it all those ways whereby we may be useful and beneficial to one another. And indeed it were pity that so good a thing should be confined within narrow bounds and limits. It reacheth to the souls of men, and to their bodies; and is conversant in all those ways and kinds whereby we may serve the temporal or spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote his present and his future happiness. What our blessed Saviour did in this kind, and we in imitation of him ought to do, I shall reduce to these two heads. 1. Doing good to the souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness. 2. The procuring of their temporal good,

good, and contributing as much as may be to their happiness in this present life.

I. Doing good to the souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness, by good instruction, and by good example.

*Ist*, By good instruction. And under instruction I comprehend all the means of bringing men to the knowledge of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by instructing their ignorance, and removing their prejudices, and rectifying their mistakes, by persuasion, and by reproof, and by making lasting provision for the promoting of these ends.

By instructing mens ignorance. And this is a duty which every man owes to another as he hath opportunity, but especially to those who are under our care and charge; our children, and servants, and near relations, those over whom we have a special authority, and a more immediate influence. This our blessed Saviour made his great work in the world, to instruct all sorts of persons in the things which concerned the kingdom of God, and to direct them in the way to eternal happiness; by public teaching, and by private conversation; and by taking occasion, from the common occurrences of human life, and every object that presented itself to him, to instil good counsel into men, and to raise their minds to the consideration of divine and heavenly things. And though this was our Saviour's great employment, and is theirs more particularly whose office it is to teach others; yet every man hath private opportunities of instructing others, by admonishing them of their duty, and by directing them to the best means and helps of knowledge; such as are books of piety and religion; with which they that are rich may furnish those who are unable to provide for themselves.

And then by removing mens prejudices against the truth, and rectifying their mistakes. This our Saviour found very difficult; the generality of those with whom he had to do being strongly prejudiced against him and his doctrine, by false principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their teachers. And therefore he used a great deal of meekness in instructing those that opposed themselves, and exercised a

bundance of patience in bearing with the infirmities of men, and their dulness and slowness of capacity to receive the truth.

And this is great charity, to consider the inveterate prejudices of men; especially those which are rooted in education, and which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to those that have been their teachers. And great allowance is to be given to men in this case, and time to bethink themselves, and to consider better: for no man that is in an error thinks he is so; and therefore if we go violently to rend their opinions from them, they will but hold them so much the faster; but if we have patience to unrip them by degrees, they will at last fall in pieces of themselves.

And when this is done, the way is open for counsel and persuasion. And this our Saviour administered in a most powerful and effectual manner, by encouraging men to repentance, and by representing to them the infinite advantages of obeying his laws, and the dreadful and dangerous consequences of breaking of them. And these are arguments fit to work upon mankind; because there is something within us that consents to the equity and reasonableness of God's laws. So that whenever we persuade men to their duty, how backward soever they may be to the practice of it, being strongly addicted to a contrary course; yet we have this certain advantage, that we have their consciences and the most inward sense of their minds on our side, bearing witness that what we counsel and persuade them to, is for their good.

And, if need be, we must add reproof to counsel. This our Saviour did with great freedom, and sometimes with sharpness and severity, according to the condition of the persons he had to deal withal. But because of his great authority, being a teacher immediately sent from God, and of his intimate knowledge of the hearts of men, he is not a pattern to us in all the circumstances of discharging this duty; which, of any other, requires great prudence and discretion, if we intend to do good, the only end to be aimed at in it: for many are fit to be reprov'd, whom yet every man is not fit to reprove; and in that case we must get it done by those that are fit; and great  
 regard

regard must be had to the time and other circumstances of doing it, so as it may most probably have its effect.

I will mention but one way of instruction more; and that is, by making lasting provision for that purpose; as, by founding schools of learning, especially to teach the poor to read, which is the key of knowledge; by building of churches, and endowing them; by buying or giving in impropriations, or the like. These are large and lasting ways of teaching and instructing others, which will continue when we are dead and gone; as it is said of Abel, that *being dead he yet speaks*. And this our Saviour virtually did, by appointing his apostles, after he had left the world, to *go and teach all nations*; and ordering a constant succession of teachers in his church, to instruct men in the Christian religion, together with an honourable maintainance for them. This we cannot do in the way that he did, who had *all power in heaven and earth*: but we may be subservient to this design in the ways that I have mentioned: which I humbly commend to the consideration of those whom God hath blessed with great estates, and made capable of effecting such great works of charity.

2dly, Another way of doing good to the souls of men, is by good example. And this our blessed Saviour was in the utmost perfection: for he *fulfilled all righteousness, had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*. And this we should endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature, and imperfection of our present state, will suffer: for good example is an unspeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a secret power and influence upon those with whom we converse, to form them into the same disposition and manners. It is a living rule, that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them see their faults without open reproof and upbraiding: besides that it adds great weight to a man's counsel and persuasion, when we see that he advises nothing but what he does, nor exacts any thing from others from which he himself desires to be excused. As; on the contrary, nothing is more cold and insignificant, than good counsel from a bad man; one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is so forward to give to others.

These

These are the several ways of doing good to the souls of men, wherein we, who are the disciples of the blessed Jesus, ought, in imitation of his example, to exercise ourselves according to our several capacities and opportunities. And this is the noblest charity, and the greatest kindness than can be shewn to human nature. It is in the most excellent sense to *give eyes to the blind*, to *set the prisoners at liberty*, to rescue men out of the saddest slavery and captivity, and to save souls from death. And it is the most lasting and durable benefit; because it is to do men good to all eternity.

2. The other way of being beneficial to others, is, by procuring their temporal good, and contributing to their happiness in this present life. And this, in subordination to our Saviour's great design of bringing men to eternal happiness, was a great part of his business and employment in this world. He went about *healing all manner of diseases*, and rescuing the bodies of men from the power and possession of the devil.

And though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was, yet we may be so in the use of ordinary means. We may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppressed, and do a great many acts of charity, which our Saviour, by reason of his poverty, could not do without a miracle. We may supply the necessities of those that are in want, *feed the hungry*, and *clothe the naked*, and *visit the sick*, and minister to them such comforts and remedies as they are not able to provide for themselves. We may take a child that is poor, and destitute of all advantages of education, and bring him up in the knowledge and fear of God; and, without any great expence, put him into a way wherein, by his diligence and industry, he may arrive to a considerable fortune in the world, and be able afterwards to relieve hundreds of others. Men glory in raising great and magnificent structures, and find a secret pleasure to see setts of their own planting to grow up and flourish: but surely it is a greater and more glorious work, to build up a man; to see a youth of our own planting, from the small beginnings and advantages we have given him, to grow up into a considerable fortune, to take root in the world, and to shoot up to such a height, and spread his branches

branches so wide, that we, who first planted him, may ourselves find comfort and shelter under his shadow. We may many times, with a small liberality, shore up a family that is ready to fall, and struggles under such necessities that it is not able to support itself. And if our minds were as great as sometimes our estates are, we might do great and public works of a general and lasting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us blessed. And those who are in the lowest condition may do great good to others by their prayers, if they themselves be as good as they ought: for *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*. The intercession of those who are in favour with God, as all good men are, are not vain wishes, but many times effectual to procure that good for others which their own endeavours could never have effected and brought about.

I have done with the first thing, the great work and business which our blessed Saviour had to do in the world; and that was to do good. I proceed to the

II. Second thing contained in the text, our Saviour's diligence and industry in this work: *He went about doing good*. He made it the great business and constant employment of his life; he travelled from one place to another, to seek out opportunities of being useful and beneficial to mankind. And this will fully appear, if we briefly consider the following particulars:

I. How unwearied our blessed Saviour was in doing good. He made it his only business, and spent his whole life in it. He was not only ready to do good to those that came to him, and gave him opportunity for it, and besought him to do it; but went himself from one place to another, to seek out objects to exercise his charity upon. He went to those who could not, and to those who would not come to him: for so it is written of him, *He came to seek and to save that which was lost*. He was contented to spend whole days in this work, to live in a crowd, and to be almost perpetually oppressed with company; and when his disciples were moved at the rudeness of the people in pressing upon him, he rebuked their impatience; and for the pleasure he took in doing good, made nothing of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.



2. If we consider how much he denied himself in the chief comforts and conveniencies of human life, that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreshments of nature, his meat and drink, and sleep, that he might attend this work. He was at every body's beck and disposal to do them good. When he was doing cures in one place, he was sent for to another; and he either went, or sent healing to them; and did by his word at a distance, what he could not come in person to do. Nay, he was willing to deny himself in one of the dearest things in the world, his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, tho' he was ill thought of, and ill spoken of for it. He would not refuse to do good on the Sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for so doing. He knew how scandalous it was among the Jews to keep company with publicans and sinners, and yet he would not decline so good a work for all the ill words they gave him for it.

3. If we consider the malicious opposition and sinister construction that his good deeds met withal. Never did so much goodness meet with so much enmity, endure so many affronts, and so much *contradiction of sinners*. This great benefactor of mankind was hated and persecuted, as if he had been a public enemy. While he was instructing them in the meekest manner, they were ready to stone him for telling them the truth: and when the fame of his miracles went abroad, though they were never so useful and beneficial to mankind; yet upon this very account they conspire against him, and seek to take away his life. Whatever he said or did, though never so innocent, never so excellent, had some bad interpretation put upon it; and the great and shining virtues of his life, were turned into crimes, and matter of accusation. For his casting out of devils, he was called a magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their vices, a *friend of publicans and sinners*; for his free and obliging conversation, a *wine-bibber and a glutton*. All the benefits which he did to men, and the blessings which he so liberally shed among the people, were construed to be a design of ambition and popularity, and done with an intention to move the people to sedition, and to make himself a king: enough to have discouraged the greatest goodness,

goodness, and have put a damp upon the most generous mind, and to make it sick and weary of well-doing. For what more grievous, than to have all the good one does ill interpreted, and the best actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach?

4. And then, lastly, if we consider how chearfully, notwithstanding all this, he persevered and continued in well-doing. It was not only his business, but his delight: *I delight (says he) to do thy will, O my God.* The pleasure which others take in the most natural actions of life, in eating and drinking when they are hungry, he took in doing good: it was *his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.* He plied this work with so much diligence, as if he had been afraid he should have wanted time for it: *I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.* And when he was approaching towards the hardest and most unpleasant part of his service, but of all others the most beneficial to us, I mean his death and sufferings, he was not at ease in his mind till it was done: *How am I straitened (says he) till it be accomplished!* And just before his suffering, with what joy and triumph does he reflect upon the good he had done in his life? *Father, I have glorified thee upon earth, and finished the work which thou hast given me to do.* What a blessed pattern is here of diligence and industry in doing good? how fair and lovely a copy for Christians to write after?

And now, that I have set it before you, it will be of excellent use to these two purposes; to shew us our defects, and to excite us to our duty.

I. To shew us our defects. How does this blessed example upbraid those who live in a direct contradiction to it; who, instead of *going about doing good*, are perpetually intent upon doing mischief; who are wise and active to do evil, but to do good have no inclination, no understanding? And those likewise who, tho' they are far from being so bad; yet wholly neglect this blessed work of doing good? They think it very fair to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man: but if preachers will be so unreasonable as to require more, and will never be satisfied till they have persuaded them out of their estate, and to give to the poor, till they have almost impoverished them-

themselves, they desire to be excused from this importunity. But we are not so unreasonable neither. We desire to put them in mind, that to be charitable according to our power is an indispensable duty of religion: that we are commanded not only to abstain from evil, but to do good: and that our blessed Saviour hath given us the example of both; he did not only *do no sin*, but *he went about doing good*. And upon this nice point it was that the young rich man in the gospel and his Saviour parted. He had kept the commandments from his youth, *Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal*; he had been very careful of the negative part of religion: but when it came to parting with his estate, and *giving to the poor*, this he thought too hard a condition; and upon this he forsook our Saviour, and forfeited the kingdom of heaven. And it is very considerable, and ought to be often and seriously thought upon, that our Saviour, describing to us the day of judgment, represents the great judge of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do, in ways of mercy and charity; for feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, and visiting the sick, or for neglecting to do these things. Than which nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the necessity of doing good, in order to the obtaining eternal happiness.

There are many indeed who do not altogether neglect the doing of this work, who yet do in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other duties and parts of religion. They are so taken up with the exercise of piety and devotion in private and public, with prayer, and reading, and hearing sermons, and preparing themselves for the sacrament, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others: or if they have, they hope God will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their piety and devotion instead of all. But they ought to consider, that when these two parts of religion come in competition, devotion is to give way to charity, mercy being better than sacrifice; that the great end of all the duties of religion, prayer, and reading, and hearing the  
word

word of God, and receiving the holy sacrament, is, to dispose and excite us to do good, to make us more ready and forward to every good work; and that it is the greatest mockery in the world, upon pretence of using the means of religion, to neglect the end of it; and because we are always preparing ourselves to do good, to think that we are for ever excused from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the faith, and spend all their zeal and heat about some controversies in religion; and therefore they think it but reasonable, that they should be excused from those meaner kind of duties; because they serve God, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way: as those who serve the king in his wars, use to be exempted from taxes and offices. But do those men consider upon what kind of duties more especially our blessed Saviour and his Apostles lay the great weight and stress of religion? that it is to the meek, and merciful, and peaceable, that our Saviour pronounceth blessedness? that *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction?* that *the wisdom which is from above, is full of mercy and good works?* These are the great and weighty things of religion, which, whatever else we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they consider, that a right faith is wholly in order to a good life, and is of no value any further than it hath an influence upon it; so that, whatever other duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuse us from this? How much better is it to do good, to be really useful and beneficial to others, and how much more clearly and certainly our duty, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men Christians indeed, they would be so much delighted and taken up with this better work (more acceptable to God, and more profitable to men) that they could not find leisure, or, if they could, they could not find in their hearts to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at so great a distance from the life and heart of religion, as most of those questions are which Christians at this day contend and languish about. Were we possessed with the true spirit of Christianity, these would be but dry, and insipid, and tasteless things to us, in comparison of the blessed employment of doing good in

a more real and substantial way. If the sincere love of God and our neighbour were but once thoroughly kindled in our hearts, these pure and heavenly flames would in a great measure extinguish the unchristian heats of disputes and contention; as fires here below are ready to languish and go out, when the sun in his full strength shines upon them.

II. But the hardest part of my task is yet behind; and it is strange it should be so; and that is, to persuade us to the imitation of this blessed example. Let us *go and do likewise; let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus*; let us tread in the steps of the great God, and the best man that ever was, our blessed Saviour, who *went about doing good*. Methinks the work itself is of that nature, that men should not need to be courted to it by persuasion, nor urged by importunity. The very proposal of the thing, and the pattern which I have set before you, is temptation and allurements enough to a generous and well-disposed mind. But yet, to influence you the more to so good a work, be pleased to dwell with me a little upon these following considerations.

I. It is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ ourselves in doing good, to extend our thoughts and care to the concernments of others, and to use our power and endeavours for their benefit and advantage; because it shews an inclination and desire in us to have others happy as well as ourselves.

Those who are of a narrow and envious spirit, of a mean and sordid disposition, love to contract themselves within themselves, and, like the hedgehog, to shoot out their quills at every one that comes near them. They take care of no body but themselves; and foolishly think their own happiness the greater, because they have it alone, and to themselves. But the noblest and most heavenly dispositions think themselves happiest when others share with them in their happiness. Of all beings, God is the farthest removed from envy; and the nearer any creature approacheth to him in blessedness, the farther it is off from this hellish quality and disposition. It is the temper of the devil, to grudge happiness to others; he envied that man should be in paradise, when he was cast out of heaven.

Other

Other perfections are (as one says) of a more melancholic and solitary disposition, and shine brightest when they are alone, or attended to but by a few; once make them common, and they lose their lustre. But it is the nature of goodness to communicate itself; and the farther it spreads, the more glorious it is. God reckons it as one of his most glorious titles, as the brightest gem in his diadem, *The Lord mighty to save*. He delights not to shew his sovereignty, in ruining the innocent, and destroying helpless creatures; but in rescuing them out of the jaws of hell and destruction. To the devil belongs the title of *the destroyer*.

Without this quality of goodness, all other perfections would change their nature, and lose their excellency. Great power and wisdom would be terrible, and raise nothing but dread and suspicion in us: for power without goodness, would be tyranny and oppression, and wisdom would become craft and treachery. A being endued with knowledge and power, and yet wanting goodness, would be nothing else but an irresistible evil, and an omnipotent mischief. We admire knowledge, and are afraid of power, and suspect wisdom; but we can heartily love nothing but goodness, or such perfections as are in conjunction with it. For knowledge and power may be in a nature most contrary to God's; the devil hath these perfections in an excelling degree. When all is done, nothing argues a great and generous mind, but only goodness; which is a propension and disposition to make others happy, and a readiness to do them all the good offices we can.

2. To do good, is the most pleasant employment in the world. It is natural; and what ever is so, is delightful. We do like ourselves, whenever we relieve the wants and distresses of others. And therefore this virtue, among all others, hath peculiarly intitled itself to the name of *humanity*. We answer our own nature, and obey our reason, and shew ourselves men, in shewing mercy to the miserable. Whenever we consider the evils and afflictions of others, we do, with the greatest reason, collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make our own wishes; and desires, and expectations from others, a law

and rule to ourselves. And this is pleasant, to follow our nature, and to gratify the importunate dictates of our own reason. So that the benefits we do to others, are not more welcome to them that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. We ease our own nature and bowels, whenever we help and relieve those who are in want and necessity. As, on the contrary, no man that hath not divested himself of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling some pain in himself. There is no sensual pleasure in the world, comparable to the delight and satisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. This Cato, in Tully, boasts of as the great comfort and joy of his old age, "That nothing was more pleasant to him than the conscience of a well-spent life, and the remembrance of many benefits and kindnesses done to others." Sensual pleasures are not lasting, but presently vanish and expire: but that is not the worst of them; they leave a sting behind them: as the pleasure goes off,

————— *Succedit frigida cura;*

sadness and melancholy come in the place of it; guilt, and trouble, and repentance follow it. But the pleasure of doing good remains after a thing is done; the thoughts of it lie easy in our minds, and the reflection upon it afterwards does for ever minister joy and delight to us. In a word, that frame of mind which inclines us to do good, is the very temper and disposition of happiness. Solomon, after all his experience of worldly pleasures, pitches at last upon this as the greatest felicity of human life, and the only good use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful fortune, Eccl. iii. 12. *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in his life.* And a greater and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that *it is more blessed to give, than to receive.*

3. To employ ourselves in doing good, is to imitate the highest excellency and perfection. It is to be like God, who is good, and doth good; and to be like him in that which he esteems his greatest glory; and that is his goodness. It is to be like the Son of God; who, when



when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the world, *went about doing good*. It is to be like the blessed angels, whose great employment it is, to be *ministring spirits* for the good of others. To be charitable, and helpful, and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a Saviour, and a God to men. And the example of our blessed Saviour more especially is the great pattern which our religion propounds to us. And we have all the reason in the world to be in love with it; because that very goodness which it propounds to our imitation, was so beneficial to ourselves. When we ourselves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the world, this should mightily endear the example to us, and make us forward to imitate that love and kindness, to which we are indebted for so many blessings, and upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend.

And there is this considerable difference between our Saviour's charity to us, and ours to others: he did all purely for our sakes, and for our benefit; whereas all the good we do to others, is a greater good done to ourselves. They indeed are beholden to us for the kindness we do them, and we to them for the opportunity of doing it. Every ignorant person that comes in our way to be instructed by us, every sinner whom we reclaim, every poor man we relieve, is a happy opportunity of doing good to ourselves, and of *laying up for ourselves a good treasure against the time which is to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life*. By this principle the best and the happiest man that ever was, governed his life and actions; esteeming it a *more blessed thing to give than to receive*.

4. This is one of the greatest and most substantial duties of religion; and, next to the love and honour which we pay to God himself, the most acceptable service that we can perform to him. It is one half of the law, and next to the first and great commandment, and very like unto it; like to it in the excellency of its nature, and in the necessity of its obligation. For *this commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also*. The first commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the second hath the advantage in the reality of its effects: *For our righteousness extendeth not*

to God: we can do him no real benefit; but our charity to men is really useful and beneficial to them. For which reason, God is contented, in many cases, that the external honour and worship which by his positive command he requires of us, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another. And, to shew how great a value he puts upon charity, he hath made it the great testimony of our love to himself; and, for want of it, rejects all other professions of love to him as false and insincere: *If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

5. This is that which will give us the greatest comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleasure to men, to reflect upon the great estates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced to; because they are leaving these things, and they will stand them in no stead in the other world: *Riches profit not in the day of wrath:* but the conscience of well-doing will refresh our souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in his life? and with what confidence doth he look over into the other world, where he hath provided for himself *bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not?* For though our estates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may send them before us, to make way for our reception into everlasting habitations. In short, works of mercy and charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us at the hands of a merciful God a glorious recompence at the resurrection of the just. Which leads me to the

6. Last consideration I shall offer you; which is, the reward of doing good, both in this world, and the other. If we believe God himself, he hath made more particular and encouraging promises to this grace and virtue, than to any other.

The advantages of it in this world are many and great. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing upon our estates.

Acts of charity are the best deeds of settlement. We gain the prayers and blessings of those to whom we extend our charity; and it is no small thing to have *the blessing of them that are ready to perish to come-upon us*: for God hears the prayers of the destitute, and his ear is open to their cry. Charity is a great security to us in times of evil; and that not only from the special promise and providence of God, which are engaged to preserve from want those that relieve the necessities of others; but likewise from the nature of the thing, which makes way for its own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others, provides a supply and retreat for himself in the day of distress: for he provokes mankind, by his example, to like tenderness towards him, and prudently bespeaks the commiseration of others against it comes to be his turn to stand in need of it. Nothing in this world makes a man more and surer friends, than charity and bounty, and such as will stand by us in the greatest troubles and dangers: *For a good man (says the Apostle) one would even dare to die.* It is excellent counsel of the son of Sirach, *Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy storehouse, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction; it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and strong spear.* It hath sometimes happened, that the obligation that men have laid upon others by their charity, hath, in case of danger and extremity, done them more kindness than all the rest of their estate could do for them; and their alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endless and unspeakable happiness of the next life, where the returns of doing good will be vastly great, beyond what we can now expect or imagine? For God takes all the good we do to others as a debt upon himself, and he hath estate and treasure enough to satisfy the greatest obligations we can lay upon him. So that we have the truth, and goodness, and sufficiency of God for our security, that what we scatter and sow in this kind, will grow up to a plentiful harvest in the other world; and that all our pains and expence in doing good for a few days, will be recompensed and crowned with the joys and glories of eternity.

## S E R M O N XIX.

On the fifth of November, 1678. Before  
the Honourable house of Commons.

LUKE ix. 55. 56.

*But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.*

**A**Mong many other things which may justly recommend the Christian religion to the approbation of mankind, the intrinsic goodness of it is most apt to make impression upon the minds of serious and considerate men. The miracles of it are the great external evidence and confirmation of its truth and divinity: but the morality of its doctrines and precepts, so agreeable to the best reason and wisest apprehensions of mankind, so admirably fitted for the perfecting of our natures, and the sweetening of the spirits and tempers of men, so friendly to human society, and every way so well calculated for the peace and order of the world; these are the things which our religion glories in, as her crown and excellency. Miracles are apt to awaken and astonish; and, by a sensible and overpowering evidence, to bear down the prejudices of infidelity: but there are secret charms in goodness, which take fast hold of the hearts of men; and do insensibly, but effectually, command our love and esteem.

And surely nothing can be more proper to the occasion of this day, than a discourse upon this argument, which so directly tends to correct that unchristian spirit and mistaken zeal which hath been the cause of all our troubles and confusions, and had so powerful an influence upon that horrid tragedy which was designed, now near upon fourscore years ago, to have been acted as upon this day.

And that we may the better understand the reason of our Saviour's reproof here in the text, it will be requisite

to consider the occasion of this hot and furious zeal which appeared in some of his disciples. And that was this: Our Saviour was going from Gallilee to Jerusalem; and, being to pass through a village of Samaria, he sent messengers before him, to prepare entertainment for him: but the people of that place would not receive him, because he was going to Jerusalem. The reason whereof was, the difference of religion which then was between the Jews and the Samaritans. Of which I shall give you this brief account.

The Samaritans were originally that colony of the Assyrians which we find in the book of Kings was, upon the captivity of the ten tribes, planted in Samaria by Salmanasser. They were Heathens, and worshipped their own idols, till they were so infested with lions, that, for the redress of this mischief, they desired to be instructed in the worship of the God of Israel, hoping by this means to appease the anger of the God of the country; and then they worshipped the God of Israel together with their own idols; for so it is said in the history of the Kings, that *they feared the Lord, and served their own gods.*

After the tribe of Judah were returned from the captivity of Babylon, and the temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt, all the Jews were obliged, by a solemn covenant, to put away their Heathen wives. It happened that Manasses, a Jewish Priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat the Samaritan; and, being unwilling to put away his wife, Sanballat excited the Samaritans to build a temple upon Mount Gerizim, near the city of Samaria; in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem; and made Manasses his son-in-law priest there.

Upon the building of this new temple there arose a great feud between the Jews and Samaritans; which in process of time grew to so violent a hatred, that they would not so much as shew common civility to one another. And this was the reason why the Samaritans would not receive our Saviour in his journey, because they perceived he was going to worship at Jerusalem.

At this uncivil usage of our Saviour, two of his disciples, James and John, presently take fire; and, out of a well-meaning zeal for the honour of their master, and of the true God, and of Jerusalem the true place of his worship,

worship, they are immediately for dispatching out of the way these enemies of God, and Christ, and the true religion, these heretics and schismatics; for so they called one another. And to this end they desire our Saviour to give them power to *call for fire from heaven to consume them*, as Elias had done in a like case, and that too not far from Samaria. And it is not improbable, that their being so near the place where Elias had done the like before, might prompt them to this request.

Our Saviour seeing them in this heat, notwithstanding all the reasons they pretended for their passion, and for all they sheltered themselves under the great example of Elias, doth very calmly, but severely, reprove this temper of theirs: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.*

Grotius observes, that these two excellent sentences are left out in a manuscript that is in England. I cannot tell what manuscript he refers to; but if it were a copy written out in the height of Popery, no wonder if some zealous transcriber, offended at this passage, struck it out of the gospel; being confident our Saviour would not say any thing that was so directly contrary to the current doctrine and practice of those times. But, thanks be to God, this admirable saying is still preserved, and can never be made use of upon a fitter occasion.

*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; that is, Ye own yourselves to be my disciples, but do you consider what spirit now acts and governs you? Not that surely which my doctrine designs to mould and fashion you into, which is not a furious, and persecuting, and destructive spirit; but mild, and gentle, and saving; tender of the lives and interests of men, even of those who are our greatest enemies.* You ought to consider, that you are not now under the rough and sour dispensation of the law, but the calm and peaceable institution of the gospel; to which the spirit of Elias, though he was a very good man in his time, would be altogether unsuitable: God permitted it then, under that imperfect way of religion; but now under the gospel it would be intolerable: for that designs universal love, and peace, and good-will: and now no difference of religion, no pretence of zeal  
for

for God and Christ, can warrant and justify this passionate and fierce, this vindictive and exterminating spirit.

*For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.* He says indeed elsewhere, that he *was not come to send peace, but a sword*; which we are not to understand of the natural tendency of his religion; but of the accidental event and effect of it, through the malice and perverseness of men. But here he speaks of the proper intention and design of his coming. He came not to kill and destroy, but *for the healing of the nations*; for the salvation and redemption of mankind, not only *from the wrath to come*, but from a great part of the evils and miseries of this life. He came to discountenance all fierceness, and rage, and cruelty in men one towards another; to restrain and subdue that furious and unpeaceable spirit, which is so troublesome to the world, and the cause of so many mischiefs and disorders in it; and to introduce a religion which consults not only the eternal salvation of mens souls, but their temporal peace and security, their comfort and happiness in this world.

The words thus explained contain this observation, That a revengeful, and cruel, and destructive spirit, is directly contrary to the design and temper of the gospel, and not to be excused upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.

In the prosecution of this argument, I shall confine my discourse to these three heads.

1. To shew the opposition of this spirit to the true spirit and design of the Christian religion.

2. The unjustifiableness of it upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.

3. To apply this discourse to the occasion of this day.

I. I shall shew the opposition of this spirit to the true spirit and design of the Christian religion; that it is directly opposite to the main and fundamental precepts of the gospel, and to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our blessed Saviour, and the primitive Christians.

1. This spirit, which our Saviour here reproves in his disciples, is directly opposite to the main and fundamental precepts of the gospel; which command us to *love one another*, and to *love all men*, even our very enemies; and



and are so far from permitting us to persecute those who hate us, that they forbid us to hate those who persecute us : they require us to be *merciful as our Father which is in heaven is merciful* ; to be kind and tender-hearted, *forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us* ; and to put on, as the elect of God, *bowels of mercy, meekness, and long-suffering* ; and to follow peace with all men, and to shew all meekness to all men. And particularly, the pastors and governors of the church are especially charged to be of this temper : *The servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.* To all which precepts, and many more that I might reckon up, nothing can be more plainly opposite than inhuman cruelties and persecutions, treacherous conspiracies and bloody massacres, a barbarous inquisition, and a holy league to extirpate all that differ from us ; and instead of *instructing meekness to those that oppose themselves*, to convert men with fire and faggot, and to teach them, as Gideon did the *men of Succoth, with briars and thorns* ; and instead of waiting for their repentance, and endeavouring to recover them out of the snare of the devil, to put them quick into his hands, and to dispatch them to hell as fast as is possible. If the precepts of Christianity can be contradicted, surely it cannot be done more grossly and palpably than by such practices.

2. This spirit is likewise directly opposite to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our blessed Saviour, and the primitive Christians. It was prophesied of our Saviour, that he should be *the prince of peace* ; and should make it one of his great businesses upon earth, to make peace in heaven and earth ; to reconcile men to God, and to one another ; to take up all those feuds, and to extinguish all those animosities that were in the world ; to bring to agreement and a peaceable demeanor one towards another, those that were most distant in their tempers and interests ; to *make the lamb and the wolf lie down together, that there might be no more destroying*

*stroying nor devouring in all God's holy mountain; that is, that that cruel and destructive spirit which prevailed before in the world, should then be banished out of all Christian societies.*

And, in conformity to these predictions, when our Saviour was born into the world, the angels sang that heavenly anthem, *Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will among men.* And when he appeared in the world, his whole life and carriage was gentle and peaceable, full of meekness and charity. His great business was, to be beneficial to others; to seek and to save that which was lost. *He went about doing good,* to the bodies and to the souls of men: his miracles were not destructive to mankind, but healing and charitable. He could, if he had pleased, by his miraculous power have confounded his enemies, and have thundered out death and destruction against the infidel world, as his pretended Vicar hath since done against heretics. But, intending that his religion should be propagated in human ways, and that men should be drawn to the profession of it by the *bands of love, and the cords of a man,* by the gentle and peaceable methods of reason and persuasion; he gave no example of a furious zeal and religious rage against those who despised his doctrine. It was propounded to men for their great advantage, and they rejected it at their utmost peril. It seemed good to the author of this institution, to compel no man to it by temporal punishments. When he went about making proselytes, he offered violence to no man; only said, *If any man will be my disciple; If any man will come after me.* And when his disciples were leaving him, he does not set up an inquisition to torture and punish them for their defection from the faith; only says, *Will ye also go away?*

And, in imitation of this blessed pattern, the Christian church continued to speak and act for several ages. And this was the language of the holy fathers: *Lex nova non se vindicat ultore gladio:* "The Christian law doth not "avenge itself by the sword." This was then the style of councils: *Nemini ad credendum vim inferre:* "To "offer violence to no man to compel him to the faith."

I proceed, in the

II. Second place, to shew the unjustifiableness of this  
VOL. I. E e spirit,

spirit, upon any pretence whatsoever of zeal for God and religion. No case can be put with circumstances of greater advantage, and more likely to justify this spirit and temper, than the case here in the text. Those against whom the disciples would have called for *fire from heaven*, were heretics, and schismatics from the true church. They had affronted our Saviour himself in his own person; the honour of God, and of that religion which he had set up in the world, and of Jerusalem which he had appointed for the place of his worship, were all concerned in this case; so that if ever it were warrantable to put on this fierce and furious zeal, here was a case that seemed to require it: but, even in these circumstances, our Saviour thinks fit to rebuke and discountenance this spirit: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* And he gives such a reason as ought, in all differences of religion, how wide soever they be, to deter men from this temper: *For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them;* that is, this spirit is utterly inconsistent with the great design of Christian religion, and the end of our Saviour's coming into the world.

And now, what hath the church of Rome to plead for her cruelty to men for the cause of religion, which the disciples might not much better have pleaded for themselves in their case? What hath she to say against those who are the objects of her cruelty and persecution, which would not have held against the Samaritans? Does she practise these severities out of a zeal for truth, and for the honour of God, and Christ, and the true religion? Why, upon these very accounts it was, that the disciples would have called for *fire from heaven* to have destroyed the Samaritans. Is the church of Rome persuaded, that those whom she persecutes, are heretics and schismatics, and that no punishment can be too great for such offenders? So the disciples were persuaded of the Samaritans; and upon much better grounds: only the disciples had some excuse in their case, which the church of Rome hath not; and that was ignorance. And this apology our Saviour makes for them, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* They had been bred up in the Jewish religion, which gave some indulgence to this kind of temper, and they were able to cite a great example for themselves;

selves; besides, they were then but learners, and not thoroughly instructed in the Christian doctrine. But in the church of Rome, whatever the case of particular persons may be, as to the whole church, and the governing part of it, this ignorance is wilful and affected; and therefore inexcusable. For the Christian religion, which they profess to embrace, does as plainly teach the contrary, as it does any other matter whatsoever: and it is not more evident in the New Testament that Christ died for sinners, than that Christians should not kill one another for the misbelief of any article of revealed religion; much less for the disbelief of such articles as are invented by men, and imposed as the doctrines of Christ.

You have heard what kind of spirit it is which our Saviour here reproves in his disciples. It was a furious and destructive spirit, contrary to Christian charity and goodness. But yet this may be said in mitigation of their fault; that they themselves offered no violence to their enemies: they left it to God, and no doubt would have been very glad that he would have manifested his severity upon them, by sending down *fire from heaven* to have consumed them.

But there is a much worse spirit than this in the world, which is not only contrary to Christianity, but to the common principles of natural religion, and even to humanity itself; which, by falshood and perfidiousness, by secret plots and conspiracies, or by open sedition and rebellion, by an inquisition or massacre, by deposing and killing Kings, by fire and sword, by the ruin of their country, and betraying it into the hands of foreigners; and, in a word, by dissolving all the bonds of human society, and subverting the peace and order of the world, that is, by all the wicked ways imaginable, doth incite men to promote and advance their religion: as if all the world were made for them, and there were not only no other Christians, but no other men besides themselves; as Babylon of old proudly vaunted, *I am, and there is none besides me*: and as if the God whom the Christians worship, were not the God of order, but of confusion; as if he whom we call *the Father of mercies*, were delighted with cruelty, and could not have a more pleasing sacrifice offered to him than a massacre; nor put a

greater honour upon his priests, than to make them judges of an inquisition; that is, the inventers and decreers of torments for men more righteous and innocent than themselves.

Thus to misrepresent God and religion, is to divest them of all their majesty and glory. For if that of Seneca be true, that *sine bonitate nulla majestas*, "without goodness there can be no such thing as majesty;" then to separate goodness and mercy from God, compassion and charity from religion, is to make the two best things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

How much righter apprehensions had the Heathen of the divine nature, which they looked upon as so benign and beneficial to mankind, that, as Tully admirably says, *Dii immortales ad usum hominum fabricati penè videantur*: "The nature of the immortal Gods may almost seem to be exactly framed for the benefit and advantage of men." And as for religion, they always spake of it as the great band of human society, and the foundation of truth, and fidelity, and justice among men. But when religion once comes to supplant moral righteousness, and to teach men the absurdest things in the world, to lie for the truth, and to kill men for God's sake; when it serves to no other purpose, but to be a bond of conspiracy, to inflame the tempers of men to a greater fierceness, and to set a keener edge upon their spirits, and to make them ten times more the *children of wrath* and cruelty than they were by nature; then surely it loses its nature, and ceases to be religion. For let any man say worse of atheism and infidelity, if he can. And, for God's sake, what is religion good for, but to reform the manners and dispositions of men, to restrain human nature from violence and cruelty, from falshood and treachery, from sedition and rebellion? Better it were there were no revealed religion, and that human nature were left to the conduct of its own principles and inclinations, which are much more mild and merciful, much more for the peace and happiness of human society, than to be acted by a religion that inspires men with so wild a fury, and prompts them to commit such outrages; and is continually supplanting government, and undermining the welfare of mankind; in short, such a religion

religion as teaches men to propagate and advance itself by means so evidently contrary to the very nature and end of all religion.

And this, if it be well considered, will appear to be a very convincing way of reasoning, by shewing the last result and consequence of such principles, and of such a train of propositions, to be a most gross and palpable absurdity. For example: We will at present admit Popery to be the true religion, and their doctrines of extirpating heretics, of the lawfulness of deposing Kings, and subverting government by all the cruel and wicked ways that can be thought of, to be, as in truth they are, the doctrines of this religion: in this case, I would not trouble myself to debate particulars: but if in the gross, and upon the whole matter, it be evident, that such a religion as this is as bad or worse than infidelity, and no religion; this is conviction enough to a wise man, and as good as a demonstration, that this is not the true religion, and that it cannot be from God.

How much better teachers of religion were the old Heathen philosophers? in all whose books and writings there is not one principle to be found of treachery or rebellion; nothing that gives the least countenance to an assassination or a massacre, to the betraying of one's native country, or the cutting of his neighbour's throat for difference in opinion. I speak it with grief and shame, because the credit of our common Christianity is somewhat concerned in it, that Panætius, and Antipater, and Diogenes the stoick, Tully, and Plutarch, and Seneca, were much honest and more Christian casuists, than the Jesuits are, or the generality of the casuists of any other order, that I know of, in the church of Rome. I come now, in the

III. Third and last place, to make some application of this discourse.

1. Let not religion suffer for those faults and miscarriages which really proceed from the ignorance of religion, and from the want of it. That, under colour and pretence of religion, very bad things are done, is no argument that religion itself is not good; because the best things are liable to be perverted and abused to very ill purposes: nay, the corruption of them is commonly

the worst; as they say, the richest and noblest wines make the sharpest vinegar. *If the light that is in you, saith our Saviour, be darkness, how great is that darkness?*

2. Let us beware of that church which countenances this unchristian spirit here condemned by our Saviour; and which teaches us such doctrines, and warrants such practices as are consonant thereto. You all know, without my saying so, that I mean the church of Rome; in which are taught such doctrines as these, That heretics, that is, all who differ from them in matters of faith, are to be extirpated by fire and sword; which was decreed in the third and fourth Lateran councils, where all Christians are strictly charged to endeavour this to the uttermost of their power, *sicut reputari cupiunt & haberi fideles*; "as they desire to be esteemed and accounted Christians." Next, their doctrines of deposing Kings, and of absolving their subjects from obedience to them; which were not only universally believed, but practised by the Popes and Roman church for several ages. Indeed this doctrine hath not been at all times alike frankly and openly avowed; but it is undoubtedly theirs; and hath frequently been put in execution, tho' they have not thought it so convenient at all turns to make profession of it. It is a certain kind of engine, which is to be screwed up or let down as occasion serves; and is commonly kept like Goliath's sword in the sanctuary behind the ephod, but yet so that the High Priest can lend it out upon an extraordinary occasion.

And for practices consonant to these doctrines, I shall go no farther than the horrid and bloody design of this day: such a mystery of iniquity, as had been hid from ages and generations; such a master-piece of villany, as eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor ever before entered into the heart of man; so prodigiously barbarous, both in the substance and circumstances of it, as is not to be paralleled in all the voluminous records of time, from the foundation of the world.

Of late years our adversaries (for so they have made themselves without any provocation of ours) have almost had the impudence to deny so plain a matter of fact; but I wish they have not taken an effectual course, by fresh conspiracies,



conspiracies, of equal or greater horror, to confirm the belief of it with a witness. But I shall not anticipate what will be more proper for another day, but confine myself to the present occasion.

I will not trouble you with a particular narrative of this dark conspiracy, nor the obscure manner of its discovery, which Bellarmine himself acknowledges not to have been without a miracle. Let us thank God that it was so happily discovered and disappointed, as I hope their present design will be by the same wonderful and merciful providence of God towards a most unworthy people. And may the lameness and halting of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, never depart from that order, but be a fate continually attending all their villanous plots and contrivances.

I shall only observe to you, that, after the discovery of this plot, the authors of it were not convinced of the evil, but sorry for the miscarriage of it. Sir Everard Digby, whose very original papers and letters are now in my hands, after he was in prison, and knew he must suffer, calls it *the best cause*; and was extremely troubled to hear it "censured by Catholics and priests, contrary to his expectation, for a great sin. Let me tell you (says he) what a grief it is, to hear THAT so much condemned, which I did believe would have been otherwise thought of by Catholics." And yet he concludes that letter with these words: "In how full joy should I die, if I could do any thing for the cause which I love more than my life!" And in another letter he says, he could have said something to have mitigated the odium of this business, as to that point of involving those of his own religion in the common ruin: "I dare not (says he) take that course that I could, to make it appear less odious; for divers were to have been brought out of danger, who now would rather hurt them than otherwise. I do not think there would have been three worth the saving, that should have been lost." And as to the rest that were to have been swallowed up in that destruction, he seems not to have the least relenting in his mind about them. All doubts he seems to have looked upon as temptations, and intreats his friends "to pray for the pardoning of his not  
" sufficient

“ sufficient strivings against temptations, since this business was undertook.”

Good God! that any thing that is called religion, should so perfectly strip men of all humanity, and transform the mild and gentle race of mankind into such wolves and tygers; that ever a pretended zeal for thy glory should instigate men to dishonour thee at such a rate! It is believed by many, and not without cause, that the Pope and his faction are the Antichrist. I will say no more than I know in this matter. I am not so sure that it is he that is particularly designed in scripture by that name, as I am of the main articles of the Christian faith; but however that be, I challenge Antichrist himself, whoever he be, and whenever he comes, to do worse and wicked things than these.

But I must remember my text, and take heed of imitating that spirit which is there condemned, whilst I am inveighing against it. And in truth it almost looks uncharitably to speak the truth in these matters, and barely to relate what these men have not blushed to do. I need not, nay I cannot aggravate these things; they are too horrible in themselves, even when they are expressed in the softest and gentlest words.

I would not be understood to charge every particular person, who is or hath been in the Roman communion, with the guilt of these or the like practices; but I must charge their doctrines and principles with them: I must charge the heads of their church, and the prevalent teaching and governing part of it, who are usually the contrivers and abettors, the executioners and applauders of these cursed designs.

I do willingly acknowledge the great piety and charity of several persons who have lived and died in that communion, as Erasmus, Father Paul, Thuanus, and many others; who had in truth more goodness than the principles of that religion do either incline men to, or allow of. And yet he that considers how universally almost the Papists in Ireland were engaged in that massacre, which is still fresh in our memories, will find it very hard to determine, how many degrees of innocency and good nature, or of coldness and indifferency in religion, are necessary

necessary to overbalance the fury of a blind zeal and a misguided conscience.

I doubt not but Papists are made like other men. Nature hath not generally given them such savage and cruel dispositions, but their religion hath made them so. Whereas true Christianity is not only the best, but the best-natured institution in the world; and so far as any church is departed from good nature, and become cruel and barbarous, so far is it degenerated from Christianity. I am loth to say it, and yet I am confident it is very true, that many Papists would have been excellent persons, and very good men, if their religion had not hindered them; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not perverted and spoiled their natural dispositions.

I speak not this to exasperate you, worthy patriots, and the great bulwark of our religion, to any unreasonable or unnecessary, much less unchristian severities against them: No: let us not do like them; let us never do any thing for religion that is contrary to it. But I speak it to awaken your care thus far, that, if their priests will always be putting these pernicious principles into the minds of the people, effectual provision may be made, that it may never be in their power again to put them in practice. We have found by experience, that ever since the reformation, they have been continually pecking at the foundations of our peace and religion: when, God knows, we have been so far from thirsting after their blood, that we did not so much as desire their disquiet, but in order to our own necessary safety, and indeed to theirs.

And God be praised for those matchless instances which we are able to give of the generous humanity and Christian temper of the English Protestants. After Queen Mary's death, when the Protestant religion was restored, Bishop Bonner, notwithstanding all his cruelties and butcheries, was permitted quietly to live and die among us. And after the treason of this day, nay at this very time, since the discovery of so barbarous a design, and the highest provocation in the world, by the treacherous murder of one of his majesty's justices of the peace (a very good man, and a most excellent magistrate) who had been active in the discovery of this plot; I say, after all this, and notwithstanding the continued and insupportable insolence

solence of their carriage and behaviour, even upon this occasion, no violence, nay, not so much as any incivility, that I ever heard of, hath been offered to any of them. I would to God they would but seriously consider this one difference between our religion and theirs, and which of them comes nearest to *the wisdom which is from above*, which is *peaceable*, and *gentle*, and *full of mercy*. And I do heartily pray, and have good hopes, that, upon this occasion, God will open their eyes so far, as to convince a great many among them, that that cannot be the true religion which inspires men with such barbarous minds.

I have now done; and if I have been transported upon this argument somewhat beyond my usual temper, the occasion of this day, and our present circumstances, will I hope, bear me out. I have expressed myself all along with a just sense, and with no unjust severity, concerning these horrid principles and practices; but yet with great pity and tenderness towards those miserable seduced souls, who have been deluded by them, and insnared in them. And I can truly say, as the Roman orator did of himself upon another occasion, *Me natura misericordem, patria, severum, crudelem nec patria nec natura esse voluit*: “My nature inclines me to be tender and compassionate; a hearty zeal for our religion, and concernment for the public welfare of my country, may perhaps have made me a little severe; but neither my natural disposition, nor the temper of the English nation, nor the genius of the Protestant, that is, the true Christian religion, will allow me to be cruel.”

For the future, let us *encourage ourselves in the Lord our God*; and *commit our cause, and the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing*: and, under God, let us leave it to the wisdom and care of his Majesty, and his two houses of parliament, to make a lasting provision for the security of our peace and religion, against all the secret contrivances and open attempts of these sons of violence. And let us remember those words of David, Psalm. xxxvii. 12. 13. 14. 15. *The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out their sword, and bent their bow to cast down*

*down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.*

And I hope, considering what God hath heretofore done, and hath now begun to do for us, we may take encouragement to ourselves against all the enemies of our religion, which are confederated against us, in the words of the Prophet, *Is. viii. 9. 10. Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: FOR GOD IS WITH US.*

And now what remains, but to make our most devout and thankful acknowledgments to Almighty God, for the invaluable blessing of our reformed religion, and for the miraculous deliverance of this day, and for the wonderful discovery of the late horrid and barbarous conspiracy against our prince, our peace, and our religion?

To him therefore, our most gracious and merciful God, our shield, and our rock, and our mighty deliverer; who hath brought us out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage; and hath set us free from Popish tyranny and superstition, a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear:

Who hath from time to time delivered us from the bloody and merciless designs of wicked and unreasonable men; and hath rendered all the plots and contrivances, the mischievous counsels and devices of these worse than Heathens, of none effect:

Who did, as upon this day, rescue our king and our princes, our nobles, and the heads of our tribes, the governours of our church, and the judges of the land, from that fearful destruction which was ready to have swallowed them up:

Who still brings to light the hidden things of darkness, and hath hitherto preserved our religion and civil interests to us, in despite of all the malicious and restless attempts of our adversaries:

Unto

Unto that great God, who hath done so great things for us, and hath saved us by a mighty salvation; who hath delivered us, and doth deliver us, and we trust will still deliver us; be glory and honour, thanksgiving and praise, from generation to generation. *And let all the people say, Amen.*

## S E R M O N XX.

Preached at the first general meeting of the gentlemen, and others, in and near London, born within the county of York.

### THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To my honoured friends and countrymen,

Mr. Hugh Frankland,  
Leonard Robinson,  
Abrah. Fothergill,  
William Fairfax,  
Thomas Johnson,  
John Hardefty,

Mr. Gervas Willocks,  
George Pickering,  
Edward Duffield,  
John Topham,  
James Longbotham,  
Nathan. Holroyd,

Stewards of the YORKSHIRE FEAST.

GENTLEMEN,

**T**HIS sermon, which was first preached, and is now published at your desires, I dedicate to your names, to whose prudence and care the direction and management of this first general meeting of our countrymen was committed; heartily wishing that it may be of some way serviceable to the healing of our unhappy differences, and the restoring of unity and christianity among Christians, especially those of the Protestant reformed religion.

I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your affectionate countryman, and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

The

## The S E R M O N.

J O H N xiii. 34. 35.

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*

**A**S the Christian religion in general is the best philosophy, and most perfect institution of life, containing in it the most entire and complete system of moral rules and precepts that ever was yet extant in the world; so it peculiarly excels in the doctrine of love and charity; earnestly recommending, strictly injoining, and vehemently, and almost perpetually pressing and inculcating the excellency and necessity of this best of graces and virtues; and propounding to us, for our imitation and encouragement, the most lively and heroical example of kindness and charity that ever was, in the life and death of the great founder of our religion, *the author and finisher of our faith*, Jesus the Son of God.

So that the gospel, as it hath in all other parts of our duty, cleared the dimness and obscurity of natural light, and supplied the imperfections of former revelations; so doth it most eminently reign and triumph in this great and blessed virtue of charity; in which all the philosophy and religions that hath been before in the world, whether Jewish or Pagan, were so remarkably defective.

With great reason then doth our blessed Saviour call this *a new commandment*, and assert it to himself as a thing peculiar to his doctrine and religion; considering how imperfectly it had been taught, and how little it had been practised in the world before: *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*

I shall reduce my discourse upon these words, under these six heads.

I. To inquire into what sense our Saviour calls this



commandment, of loving one another, *a new commandment.*

2. To declare to you the nature of this commandment, by instancing in the chief acts and properties of love.

3. To consider the degrees and measures of our charity, with regard to the several objects about which it is exercised.

4. Our obligation to this duty, not only from our Saviour's authority, but likewise from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing commanded.

5. The great example which is here propounded to our imitation: *As I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

6. And lastly, The place and rank which this precept holds in the Christian religion. Our Saviour makes it the proper badge of a *disciple*, the distinctive mark and character of our profession: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*

I. In what sense our Saviour calls this commandment, of loving one another, *a new commandment*: not that it is absolutely and altogether new, but upon some special accounts. For it is a branch of the ancient and primitive law of nature. Aristotle truly observes, that, upon grounds of natural kindred and likeness, all men are friends, and kindly disposed towards one another. And it is a known precept of the Jewish religion, to *love our neighbour as ourselves.*

In some sense then it is *no new commandment.* And so St. John, who was most likely to understand our Saviour's meaning in this particular (all his preaching and writing being almost nothing else, but an inculcating of this one precept) explains this matter, telling us that in several respects it was, and it was not *a new commandment*: 1 John, ii. 7. 8. *Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but that which ye had from the beginning*; that is, from ancient times. But then he corrects himself: *Again παλιν, but yet a new commandment I write unto you.* So that, tho' it was not absolutely new, yet, upon divers considerable accounts it was so, and in a peculiar manner proper to the evangelical institution; and

and is in so express and particular a manner ascribed to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, which was conferred upon Christians by the faith of the gospel, as if there hardly needed any outward instruction and exhortation to that purpose, 1 Thef. iv. 9. *But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are θεοδιδαστοι, divinely taught and inspired to love one another.*

This commandment then, of *loving one another*, is by our Lord and Saviour so much enlarged as to the object of it, beyond what either the Jews or Heathens did understand it to be, extending to all mankind, and even to our greatest enemies; so greatly advanced and heightened as to the degree of it, even to the laying down of our lives for one another; so effectually taught, so mightily encouraged, so very much urged and insisted upon, that it may very well be called *a new commandment*. For tho' it was not altogether unknown to mankind before, yet it was never so taught, so encouraged; never was such an illustrious example given of it, never so much weight and stress laid upon it by any philosophy or religion that was before in the world.

II. I shall endeavour to declare to you the nature of this commandment, or the duty required by it. And that will best be done; by instancing in the chief acts and properties of love and charity: as, humanity and kindness in all our carriage and behaviour towards one another; for love smooths the dispositions of men, so that they are not apt to grate upon one another: next, to rejoice in the good and happiness of one another, and to grieve at their evils and sufferings; for love unites the interests of men so as to make them affected with what happens to another, as if it were in some sort their own case; then to contribute as much as in us lies to the happiness of one another, by relieving one another's wants, and redressing their misfortunes: again, tenderness of their good name and reputation; a proneness to interpret all the words and actions of men to the best sense; patience and forbearance towards one another; and when differences happen, to manage them with all possible calmness and kindness, and to be ready to forgive and to be reconciled to one another; to pray one for another; and, if occa-

sion be, at least if the public good of Christianity require it, to be ready to lay down our lives for our brethren, and to sacrifice ourselves for the furtherance of their salvation.

III. We will consider the degrees and measures of our charity, with regard to the various objects about which it is exercised.

And as to the negative part of this duty, it is to be extended equally towards all. We are not to hate or bear ill-will to any man, or to do him any harm or mischief: *Love worketh no evil to his neighbour.* Thus much charity we are to exercise towards all, without any exception, without any difference.

And as to the positive part of this duty, we should bear an universal good-will to all men, wishing every man's happiness, and praying for it as heartily as for our own: and if we be sincere herein, we shall be ready upon all occasions to procure and promote the welfare of all men. But the outward acts and testimonies of our charity neither can be actually extended to all, nor ought to be to all alike. We do not know the wants of all, and therefore our knowledge of persons, and of their conditions, doth necessarily limit the effects of our charity within a certain compass; and of those we do know, we can but relieve a small part for want of ability. Whence it becomes necessary, that we set some rules to ourselves for the more discreet ordering of our charity; such as these. Cases of extremity ought to take place of all others; obligations of nature, and nearness of relation, seem to challenge the next place; obligations of kindness, and upon the account of benefits received, may well lay the next claim; and then the *household of faith* is to be peculiarly considered. And after these, the merit of the persons, and all circumstances belonging to them, are to be weighed and valued. Those who labour in an honest calling, but are oppressed with their charge; those who are fallen from a plentiful condition, especially by misfortune, and the providence of God, without their own fault; those who have relieved others, and have been eminently charitable and beneficial to mankind; and, lastly, those whose visible necessities and infirmities of body or mind, whether by age or by accident, do plead for

for them: all these do challenge our more especial regard and consideration.

IV. We will consider our obligations to this duty, not only from our Saviour's authority, but likewise from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing commanded. This is the commandment of the Son of God, who came down from heaven with full authority to declare the will of God to us. And this is peculiarly *his commandment*, which he urged upon his disciples so earnestly, and so as if he almost required nothing else in comparison of this: John xv. 12. *This is my commandment, that ye love one another*; and v. 17. *These things I command you, that ye love one another*: as if this were the end of all his precepts, and of his whole doctrine, to bring us to the practice of this duty. And so St. John, the loving and beloved disciple, speaks of it as the great message which the Son of God was to deliver to mankind: 1 John, iii. 11. *This is the message which ye have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*; and v. 23. *This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment*; and chap. iv. 21. *This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God; loveth his brother also*.

But besides the authority of our Saviour, we have a precedent obligation to it from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing itself. The frame of our nature disposeth us to it, and our inclination to society, in which there can be no pleasure, no advantage, without mutual love and kindness. And equity also calls for it; for that we ourselves wish and expect kindness from others, is conviction enough to us that we owe it to others. The fulfilling of this law is the great perfection of our natures, the advancement and enlargement of our souls, the chief ornament and beauty of a great mind. It makes us like to God, the best, and most perfect, and happiest being, in that which is the prime excellency, and happiness, and glory of the divine nature.

And the advantages of this temper are unspeakable and innumerable. It freeth our souls from those unruly, and troublesome, and disquieting passions; which are the great

torment of our spirits; from anger and envy, from malice and revenge, from jealousy and discontent. It makes our minds calm and chearful, and puts our souls into an easy posture, and into good humour; and maintains us in the possession and enjoyment of ourselves: it preserves men from many mischiefs and inconveniencies, to which enmity and ill-will do perpetually expose them: it is apt to make friends, and to gain enemies; and to render every condition either pleasant, or easy, or tolerable to us. So that to love others, is the truest love to ourselves; and doth redound to our own unspeakable benefit and advantage in all respects.

It is a very considerable part of our duty, and almost equalled by our Saviour with the *first and great commandment of the law*. It is highly acceptable to God, most beneficial to others, and very comfortable to ourselves. It is the easiest of all duties, and it makes all others easy; the pleasure of it makes the pains to signify nothing, and the delightful reflection upon it afterwards is a most ample reward of it. It is a duty in every man's power to perform, how strait and indigent soever his fortune and condition be. The poorest man may be as charitable as a prince; he may have as much kindness in his heart, though his hand cannot be so bountiful and munificent. Our Saviour instanceth in the giving of a *cup of cold water*, as a charity that will be highly accepted and rewarded by God. And one of the most celebrated charities that ever was, how small was it for the matter of it, and yet how great in regard of the mind who gave it? I mean the widow's *two mites*, which she *cast into the treasury*. One could hardly give less, and yet none can give more; for she gave *all she had*. All these excellencies and advantages of love and charity, which I have briefly recounted, are so many arguments, so many obligations to the practice of this duty.

V. We will consider the great instance and example which is here propounded to our imitation: *As I have loved you, that ye also love one another*. The Son of God's becoming man, his whole life, his bitter death and passion, all that he did, and all that he suffered, was one great and continued proof and evidence of his mighty love to mankind. The greatest instance of love among  
men,

men, and that too but very rare, is for a man *to lay down his life for another, for his friend*; but the Son of God died for all mankind, and we were all his enemies. And should we not cheerfully imitate the example of that great love and charity, the effects whereof are so comfortable, so beneficial, so happy to every one of us? Had he not loved us, and died for us, we had certainly perished, we had been miserable and undone to all eternity.

And to perpetuate this great example of charity, and that it might be always fresh in our memories, the great sacrament of our religion was on purpose instituted for the commemoration of this great love of the Son of God, in laying down his life, and shedding his precious blood, for the wicked and rebellious race of mankind. But I have not time to enlarge upon this noble argument as it deserves.

VI. The last thing to be considered is, the place and rank which this precept and duty holds in the Christian religion. Our blessed Saviour here makes it the proper badge and cognisance of our profession: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.* The different sects among the Jews had some peculiar character to distinguish them from one another. The scholars of the several great Rabbi's among them had some peculiar sayings and opinions, some customs and traditions, whereby they were severally known: and so likewise the disciples of John the Baptist were particularly remarkable for their great austerities. In allusion to these distinctions of sects and schools among the Jews, our Saviour fixeth upon this mark and character, whereby his disciples should be known from the disciples of any other institution, a mighty love and affection to one another.

Other sects were distinguished by little opinions, or by some external rites and observances in religion; but our Saviour pitcheth upon that which is the most real and substantial, the most large and extensive, the most useful and beneficial, the most humane and the most divine quality of which we are capable.

This was his great commandment to his disciples before he left the world; this was the legacy he left them, and the effect of his last prayers for them; and for this end, among others, he instituted the sacrament of his  
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bleſſed body and blood, to be a lively remembrance of his great charity to mankind, and a perpetual bond of love and union amongſt his followers.

And the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour do upon all occaſions recommend this to us, as a principal duty and part of our religion; telling us, that *in Chriſt Jeſus*, that is, in the Chriſtian religion, nothing will *avail*, no not *faith* itſelf, unleſs it be enlivened and inſpired by *charity*; that *love is the end of the commandment*,  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \pi\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\alpha\varsigma$ , *the end of the evangelical declaration*, the *fiſt fruit of the Spirit*, the ſpring and root of all thoſe graces and virtues which concern our duty towards one another; that it is the ſum and abridgement, the accompliſhment and *fulfilling of the whole law*; that without this, whatever we pretend to in Chriſtianity, *we are nothing*, and our religion is *vain*; that this is the greateſt of all graces and virtues, greater than *faith* and *hope*; and of perpetual uſe and duration: *Charity never fails*.

And therefore they exhort us above all things to endeavour after it, as the crown of all other virtues: *Above all things have fervent charity among yourſelves*, ſaith St. Peter. And St. Paul having enumerated moſt other Chriſtian virtues, exhorts us above all to ſtrive after this: *And above all theſe things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection*. This St. John makes one of the moſt certain ſigns of our love to God, and the want of it an undeniable argument of the contrary: *If a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he who loveth not his brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath not ſeen?* This he declares to be one of the beſt evidences that we are in a ſtate of grace and ſalvation: *Hereby we know that we are paſſed from death to life, becauſe we love the brethren*.

So that well might our bleſſed Saviour chuſe this for the badge of his diſciples, and make it the great precept of the beſt and moſt perfect institution. Other things might have ſerved better for pomp and oſtentation; and have more gratified the curioſity, or enthuiſaſm, or ſuperſtition of mankind: but there is no quality in the world which, upon a ſober and impartial conſideration, is of a more ſolid and intrinsic value.

And



And in the first ages of Christianity, the Christians were very eminent for this virtue, and particularly noted for it. *Nobis notam inurit apud quosdam*: "It is a mark and brand set upon us by some," saith Tertullian; and he tells us, that it was proverbially said among the Heathen, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Lucian, that great scoffer at all religion, acknowledgeth in behalf of Christians, that this was the great principle which their master had instilled into them. And Julian, the bitterest enemy that Christianity ever had, could not forbear to propound to the Heathen for an example the charity of the Gallileans; for so, by way of reproach, he calls the Christians; "who (says he) gave up themselves to humanity and kindness;" which he acknowledgeth to have been very much to the advantage and reputation of our religion. And in the same letter to Arfacius, the Heathen High Priest of Galatia, he gives this memorable testimony of the Christians, that their charity was not limited and confined only to themselves, but extended even to their enemies; which could not be said either of the Jews or Heathens. His words are these: "It is a shame, that when the Jews suffer none of theirs to beg, and the impious Gallileans relieve not only their own, but those also of our religion, that we only should be defective in so necessary a duty." By all which it is evident, that love and charity is not only the great precept of our Saviour, but was in those first and best times the general practice of his disciples, and acknowledged by the Heathens as a very peculiar and remarkable quality in them:

The application I shall make of this discourse shall be threefold.

1. With relation to the church of Rome.
2. With regard to ourselves, who profess the Protestant Reformed religion.
3. With a more particular respect to the occasion of this meeting.

1. With relation to the church of Rome; which we cannot chuse but think of whenever we speak of charity, and loving one another; especially having had so late a discovery of their affection to us, and so considerable a testimony of the kindness and charity which they designed towards

towards us : such as may justly *make the ears of all that bear it to tingle*, and render Popery execrable and infamous, a frightful and a hateful thing to the end of the world.

It is now but too visible how grossly this great commandment of our Saviour is contradicted, not only by the practices of those in that communion, from the Pope down to the meanest Friar; but by the very doctrines and principles, by the genius and spirit of that religion, which is wholly calculated for cruelty and persecution. Where now is that mark of a *disciple*, so much insisted upon by our Lord and Master, to be found in that church? and yet what is the Christian church, but the society and community of Christ's disciples? Surely, in all reason, that which our Lord made the distinctive mark and character of his disciples, should be the principal mark of a true church. Bellarmine reckons up no less than fifteen marks of the true church; all which the church of Rome arrogates to herself alone: but he wisely forgot that which is worth all the rest, and which our Saviour insists upon as the chief of all other, *A sincere love and charity to all Christians*. This he knew would by no means agree to his own church.

But, for all that, it is very reasonable that churches, as well as particular Christians, should be judged by their charity. The church of Rome would ingross all faith to herself; faith in its utmost perfection, to the degree and pitch of infallibility. And they allow no body in the world, besides themselves, no, though they believe all the articles of the Apostles creed, to have one grain of true faith; because they do not believe upon the authority of their church, which they pretend to be the only foundation of true faith. This is a most arrogant and vain pretence: but, admit it were true, yet, in the judgment of St. Paul, *though they had all faith, if they have not charity, they are nothing*.

The greatest wonder of all is this, that they who hate and persecute Christians most, do all this while, the most confidently of all others, pretend to be the disciples of Christ; and will allow none to be so but themselves. That church which excommunicates all other Christian churches in the world, and, if she could, would extir-

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pate them out of the world, will yet needs assume to herself to be the only Christian church; as if our Saviour had said, "*Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye hate, and excommunicate, and kill one another.*" *What shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? thou empty and impudent pretence of Christianity!*

2. With relation to ourselves, who profess the Protestant Reformed religion. How is this great precept of our Saviour not only shamefully neglected, but plainly violated by us? and that not only by private hatred and ill-will, quarrels and contentions in our civil conversation and intercourse with one another, but by most unchristian divisions and animosities, in that common relation wherein we stand to one another, as brethren, as Christians, as Protestants?

*Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?* and are we not in a more peculiar and eminent manner brethren, being *all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ?* Are we not all members of the same body, and partakers of the same spirit, and heirs of the same blessed hopes of eternal life?

So that, being brethren upon so many accounts, and by so many bonds and endearments all united to one another, and all travelling towards the same heavenly country, *why do we fall out by the way, since we be brethren?* Why do we not, as becomes brethren, dwell together in unity? but are so apt to quarrel, and break out into heats, to crumble into sects and parties, to divide and separate from one another upon every slight and trifling occasion?

Give me leave a little more fully to expostulate this matter, but very calmly, and *in the spirit of meekness*, and in the name of our dear Lord, who loved us all *at such a rate as to die for us*, to recommend to you this new commandment of his, *that ye love one another*: which is almost a new commandment still, and hardly the worse for wearing; so seldom it is put on, and so little hath it been practised among Christians for several ages.

Consider seriously with yourselves: Ought not the great matters wherein we are agreed, our union in the doctrines of the Christian religion, and in all the necessary articles of that *faith which was once delivered to the*  
*Saints,*

*saints*, in the same sacraments; and in all the substantial parts of God's worship, and in the great duties and virtues of the Christian life, to be of greater force to unite us, than difference in doubtful opinions, and in little rites and circumstances of worship, to divide and break us?

Are not the things about which we differ, in their nature indifferent? that is, things about which there ought to be no difference among wise men? Are they not at a great distance from the life and essence of religion, and rather good or bad, as they tend to the peace and unity of the church, or are made use of to schism and faction, than either necessary or evil in themselves? and shall little scruples weigh so far with us, as, by breaking the peace of the church about them, to endanger our whole religion? Shall we take one another by *the throat for a hundred pence*, when our common adversary stands ready to clap upon us an action of *ten thousand talents*? Can we in good earnest be contented, that, rather than the surplice should not be thrown out, Popery should come in? and, rather than receive the sacrament in the humble, but indifferent posture of kneeling, to swallow the camel of transubstantiation, and adore the elements of bread and wine for our God and Saviour? and, rather than to submit to a set form of prayer, to have the service of God performed in an *unknown tongue*?

Are we not yet made sensible, *at least in this our day*, by so clear a demonstration as the providence of God hath lately given us; and, had not he been infinitely merciful to us, might have proved the dearest and most dangerous experiment that ever was: I say, are we not yet convinced, what mighty advantages our enemies have made of our divisions, and what a plentiful harvest they have had among us, during our differences, and upon occasion of them? and how near their religion was to have entered in upon us at once, at those wide breaches which we had made for it? And will we take counsel of our enemies, and chuse to follow that course, to which, of all other; they who hate us, and seek our ruin, would most certainly advise and direct us? Will we freely offer them that advantage which they would be contented to purchase at any rate?

Let us, after all our sad experience, at last take warning

ing to keep a stedfast eye upon our chief enemy, and not suffer ourselves to be diverted from the consideration and regard of our greatest danger by the petty provocations of our friends. So I chuse to call those who dissent from us in lesser matters; because I would fain have them so; and they ought in all reason to be so.

But, however they behave themselves, we ought not much to mind those who only sling dirt at us, whilst we are sure there are others who fly at our throats, and strike at our very hearts. Let us learn this wisdom of our enemies, who, though they have many great differences among themselves, yet they have made a shift, at this time, to unite together to destroy us. And shall not we do as much to save ourselves?

— *Fas est & ab hoste doceri.*

It was a principle among the ancient Romans, a brave and wise people, *donare inimicitias reipublicæ*: “to give up and sacrifice their private enmities and quarrels to the public good and the safety of the commonwealth.” And is it not to every considerate man as clear as the sun at noon-day, that nothing can maintain and support the Protestant religion amongst us, and found our church upon a rock; so that when the rain falls, and the winds blow, and the floods beat upon it, it shall stand firm and unshaken; that nothing can be a bulwark of sufficient force to resist all the arts and attempts of Popery, but an established national religion, firmly united and compacted in all the parts of it? Is it not plain to every eye, that little sects and separate congregations can never do it? but will be like a foundation of sand to a weighty building, which, whatever shew it may make, cannot stand long, because it wants union at the foundation, and for that reason must necessarily want strength and firmness?

It is not for private persons to undertake in matters of public concernment: but I think we have no cause to doubt, but the governors of our church, notwithstanding all the advantages of authority, and we think of reason too on our side, are persons of that piety and prudence, that, for peace sake, and in order to a firm union among Protestants, they would be content, if that would do it, not to insist upon little things; but to yield them up,

whether to the infirmity or importunity, or perhaps, in some very few things, to the plausible exceptions of those who differ from us.

But then, surely, on the other side, men ought to bring along with them a peaceable disposition, and a mind ready to comply with the church in which they were born and baptized, in all reasonable and lawful things; and desirous, upon any terms that are tolerable, to return to the communion of it: a mind free from passion and prejudice, from peevish exceptions, and groundless and endless scruples; not apt to insist upon little cavils and objections, to which the very best things, and the greatest and the clearest truths in the world, are, and always will be liable: and whatever they have been heretofore, to be *henceforth no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive.*

And if we were thus affected on all hands, we might yet be a happy church and nation. If we would govern ourselves by these rules, and walk according to them, *peace would be upon us, and mercy, and on the Israel of God.*

3. I shall conclude all with a few words in relation to the occasion of this present meeting. I have all this while been recommending to you, from the authority and example of our blessed Saviour, and from the nature and reason of the thing itself, this most excellent grace and virtue of charity, in the most proper acts and instances of it. But, besides particular acts of charity to be exercised upon emergent occasions, there are likewise charitable customs which are highly commendable; because they are more certain and constant, of a larger extent, and of a longer continuance; as, the meeting of the sons of the clergy, which is now formed and established into a charitable corporation; and the anniversary meetings of those of the several counties of England who reside or happen to be in London, for two of the best and noblest ends that can be, the maintaining of friendship, and the promoting of charity. These, and others of the like kind, I call *charitable customs*, which of late years have very much obtained in this great and famous city.

city. And it cannot but be a great pleasure and satisfaction to all good men, to see so generous, so humane, so Christian a disposition, to prevail and reign so much amongst us.

The strange overflowing of vice and wickedness in our land, and the prodigious increase and impudence of infidelity and impiety, hath of late years boded very ill to us, and brought terrible judgments upon this city and nation, and seems still to threaten us with more and greater. And the greatest comfort I have had, under these sad apprehensions of God's displeasure, hath been this, that though bad men were perhaps never worse in any age, yet the good, who I hope are not a few, were never more truly and substantially good. I do verily believe, there never were, in any time, greater and more real effects of charity; not from a blind superstition, and an ignorant zeal, and a mercenary, and arrogant, and presumptuous principle of merit, but from a sound knowledge, and a sincere love and obedience to God; or, as the Apostle expresseth it, *out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

And who that loves God and religion, can chuse but take great contentment, to see so general and forward an inclination in people this way? which hath been very much cherished of late years by this sort of meetings; and that to very good purpose and effect, in many charitable contributions, disposed in the best and wisest ways; and which likewise hath tended very much to the reconciling of the minds of men, and the allaying of those fierce heats and animosities which have been caused by our civil confusions and religious distractions. For there is nothing many times wanting to take away prejudice, and to extinguish hatred and ill-will, but an opportunity for men to see and understand one another; by which they will quickly perceive, that they are not such monsters as they have been represented one to another at a distance.

We are, I think, one of the last counties of England that have entered into this friendly and charitable kind of society: let us make amends for our late setting out, by quickening our pace, that so we may overtake and outstrip those who are gone before us. Let not our cha-



rity partake of the coldness of our climate; but let us endeavour that it may be equal to the extent of our country: and as we are incomparably the greatest county of England, let it appear that we are so by the largeness and extent of our charity.

“ O Lord, who hast taught us, that all our doings  
 “ without charity are nothing, send thy Holy Ghost, and  
 “ pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of chari-  
 “ ty, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues; with-  
 “ out which whosoever liveth is counted dead before  
 “ thee. Grant this for thy only Son Jesus Christ’s sake.”

*Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## S E R M O N XXI.

### Of the trial of the spirits.

Preached at Whitehall, April 4. 1679.

#### I JOHN iv. 1.

*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

**T**His caution and counsel was given upon occasion of the false prophets and teachers that were risen up in the beginning of the Christian church, who endeavoured to seduce men from the true doctrine of the gospel delivered by the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour: and these teaching contrary things, could not both be from God; and therefore St. John calls upon Christians to examine the doctrines and pretences of those new teachers, whether they were from God, or not. *Be-  
lieve*

*lieve not every spirit*; that is, not every one that takes upon him to be inspired, and to be a teacher come from God: *but try the spirits*; that is, examine those that make this pretence, whether it be real or not; and examine the doctrines which they bring, because there are many impostors abroad in the world.

This is the plain sense of the words. In which there are contained these four propositions.

1. That men may, and often do, falsely pretend to inspiration. And this is the reason upon which the Apostle grounds this exhortation: *Because many false prophets are gone out into the world*, therefore we should try who are true, and who are false.

2. We are not to believe every one that pretends to be inspired, and to teach a divine doctrine. This follows upon the former: because men may falsely pretend to inspiration, therefore we are not to believe every one that makes this pretence. For any man that hath but confidence enough, and conscience little enough, may pretend to come from God: and if we admit all pretences of this kind, we lie at the mercy of every crafty and confident man, to be led by him into what delusions he pleaseth.

3. Neither are we to reject all that pretend to come from God. This is sufficiently implied in the text, for when the Apostle says, *Believe not every spirit*, he supposeth we are to believe some; and when he saith *Try the spirits whether they be of God*, he supposeth some to be of God; and that those which are so, are to be believed. These three observations are so plain, that I need only to name them, to make way for the

4. Fourth, which I designed principally to insist upon from these words; and that is this, That there is some way to discern mere pretenders to inspiration, from those who are truly and divinely inspired. And this is necessarily implied in the Apostle's bidding us to *try the spirits whether they are of God*: for it were in vain to make any trial, if there be no way to discern between pretended and real inspiration.

Now, the handling of this will give occasion to two very material inquiries, and useful to be resolved.

1. How we may discern between true and counterfeit doctrines;

doctrines; those which really are from God, and those which only pretend to be so?

2. To whom this judgment of discerning doth appertain?

1. How we may discern between true and counterfeit doctrines and revelations? For the clearing of this I shall lay down these following propositions.

1. That reason is the faculty whereby revelations are to be discerned; or, to use the phrase in the text, it is that whereby we are to judge what spirits are of God, and what not. For all revelation from God supposeth us to be men, and to be endued with reason; and therefore it does not create new faculties in us, but propounds new objects to that faculty which was in us before. Whatever doctrines God reveals to men, are propounded to their understandings; and by this faculty we are to examine all doctrines which pretend to be from God, and, upon examination, to judge whether there be reason to receive them as divine, or to reject them as impostures.

2. All supernatural revelation supposeth the truth of the principles of natural religion. We must first be assured that there is a God, before we can know that he hath made any revelation of himself: and we must know that his words are true; otherwise there were no sufficient reason to believe the revelations which he makes to us: and we must believe his authority over us, and that he will reward our obedience to his laws, and punish our breach of them; otherwise there would neither be sufficient obligation nor encouragement to obedience. These, and many other things, are supposed to be true, and naturally known to us, antecedently to all supernatural revelation; otherwise the revelations of God would signify nothing to us, nor be of any force with us.

3. All reasonings about divine revelations must necessarily be governed by the principles of natural religion; that is, by those apprehensions which men naturally have of the divine perfections, and by the clear notions of good and evil which are imprinted upon our natures: because we have no other way to judge what is worthy of God, and credible to be revealed by him, and what not, but by the natural notions which we have of God, and of his essential perfections; which, because we know him

to be immutable, we have reason to believe he will never contradict. And by these principles likewise we are to interpret what God hath revealed; and when any doubt ariseth concerning the meaning of any divine revelation (as that of the Holy Scriptures) we are to govern ourselves, in the interpretation of it, by what is most agreeable to those natural notions which we have of God; and we have all the reason in the world to reject that sense which is contrary thereto. For instance: When God is represented in scripture as having a human shape, eyes, ears, and hands; the notions which men naturally have of the divine nature and perfections, do sufficiently direct us to interpret these expressions in a sense worthy of God, and agreeable to his perfection: and therefore it is reasonable to understand them as rather spoken to our capacity, and in a figure, than to be literally intended. And this will proportionably hold in many other cases.

4. Nothing ought to be received as a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts the principles of natural religion, or overthrows the certainty of them. For instance: it were in vain to pretend a revelation from God, That there is no God, because this is a contradiction in terms. So likewise to pretend a command from God, That we are to hate and despise him; because it is not credible, that God should require any thing of reasonable creatures so unsuitable to their natures, and to their obligations to him: besides, that such a law as this does tacitely involve a contradiction; because, upon such a supposition, to despise God, would be to obey him; and yet, to obey him, is certainly to honour him. So that in this case, to honour God, and to despise him, would be the same thing, and equal contempts of him. In like manner it would be in vain to pretend any revelation from God, That there is no life after this, nor rewards and punishments in another world; because this is contrary to those natural apprehensions which have generally possessed mankind, and would take away the main force and sanction of the divine laws. The like may be said concerning any pretended revelation from God, which evidently contradicts those natural notions which men have of good and evil; as, That God should command or allow sedition and rebellion, perfidiousness and perjury; because

because the practice of these would be apparently destructive of the peace and happiness of mankind, and would naturally bring confusion into the world: but *God is not the God of Confusion, but of Order*; which St. Paul appeals to as a principle naturally known. Upon the same account, nothing ought to be entertained as a divine revelation, which overthrows the certainty of the principles of natural religion; because that would take away the certainty of divine revelation itself, which supposeth the truth of those principles. For instance: whoever pretends any revelation that brings the providence of God into question, does by that very thing make such a revelation questionable: for if God take no care of the world, have no concernment for human affairs, why should we believe that he makes any revelation of his will to men? And by this principle Moses will have false prophets to be tried, Deut. xiii. 1. *If there arise among you a prophet, and giveth thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet.* And he gives the reason of this, v. 5. *Because he hath spoken unto you to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.* Here is a case wherein a false prophet is supposed to work a true miracle, to give credit to his doctrine, which in other cases the scripture makes the sign of a true prophet; but yet in this case he is to be rejected as an impostor; because the doctrine he teacheth would draw men off from the worship of the true God, who is naturally known, and hath manifested himself to the people of Israel in so miraculous a manner, by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So that a miracle is not enough to give credit to a prophet, who teacheth any thing contrary to that natural notion which men have, that there is but one God, who only ought to be worshipped.

5. Nothing ought to be received as a divine doctrine and revelation, without good evidence that it is so; that is, without some argument sufficient to satisfy a prudent and considerate man. Now, supposing there be nothing in the matter of the revelation that is evidently contrary

to the principles of natural religion, nor to any former revelation which hath already received a greater and more solemn attestation from God, miracles are owned by all mankind to be a sufficient testimony to any person, or doctrine, that they are from God. This was the testimony which God gave to Moses, to satisfy the people of Israel that he had sent him: *Exod. iv. 1. 2. Moses said, They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.* Upon this God endues him with a power of miracles, to be an evidence to them, *That they may believe that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.* And all along in the Old Testament, when God sent his prophets to make a new revelation, or upon any strange and extraordinary message, he always gave credit to them by some sign or wonder, which they foretold or wrought. And when he sent his Son into the world, he gave testimony to him by innumerable, great and unquestionable miracles, more and greater than Moses and all the prophets had wrought. And there was great reason for this; because our Saviour came not only to publish a new religion to the world, but to put an end to that religion which God had instituted before. And now that the gospel hath had the confirmation of such miracles as never were wrought upon any other occasion, no evidence inferior to this can in reason controul this revelation, or give credit to any thing contrary to it. And therefore, though the false prophets and antichrists foretold by our Saviour, did really work miracles; yet they were so inconsiderable in comparison of our Saviour's, that they deserve no credit, in opposition to that revelation which had so clear a testimony given to it from heaven by miracles, besides all other concurring arguments to confirm it.

6. And lastly, No argument is sufficient to prove a doctrine or revelation to be from God, which is not clearer and stronger than the difficulties and objections against it; because all assent is grounded upon evidence, and the strongest and clearest evidence always carries it: but where the evidence is equal on both sides, that can produce nothing but a suspence and doubt in the mind, whether the thing be true or not. If Moses had not confuted

futed Pharaoh's magicians, by working miracles which they could not work, they might reasonably have disputed it with him, who had been the true prophet; but when he did works plainly above the power of their magic and the devil to do, then they submitted, and acknowledged, that *there was the finger of God*. So likewise, tho' a person work a miracle, which ordinarily is a good evidence that he is sent by God; yet if the doctrine he brings be plainly contrary to those natural notions which we have of God, this is a better objection against the truth of this doctrine, than the other is a proof of it; as is plain in the case which Moses puts, Deut. xiii. which I mentioned before.

Upon the same account no man can reasonably believe the doctrine of transubstantiation to be revealed by God; because every man hath as great evidence that transubstantiation is false, as any man can pretend to have that God hath revealed any such thing. Suppose transubstantiation to be part of the Christian doctrine, it must have the same confirmation with the whole; and that is, miracles. But, of all doctrines in the world, it is peculiarly incapable of being proved by a miracle: for, if a miracle were wrought for the proof of it, the very same assurance which a man hath of the truth of the miracle, he hath of the falshood of the doctrine; that is the clear evidence of his senses for both. For that there is a miracle wrought to prove, that what he sees in the sacrament is not bread, but the body of Christ, he hath only the evidence of his senses; and he hath the very same evidence to prove, that what he sees in the sacrament is not the body of Christ, but bread. So that here ariseth a new controversy, whether a man should believe his senses giving testimony against the doctrine of transubstantiation, or bearing testimony to the miracle which is wrought to confirm that doctrine? for there is just the same evidence against the truth of the doctrine, which there is for the truth of the miracle. So that the argument for transubstantiation, and the objection against it, do just balance one another; and where the weights in both scales are equal, it is impossible that the one should weigh down the other; and consequently transubstantiation is not to be proved by a miracle; for that would  
be,



be, to prove to a man by something that he sees, that he does not see what he sees.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and clearly as I could, to give satisfaction to the first inquiry I propounded, *viz.* How we may discern between true and counterfeit revelations and doctrines? I proceed now to the

II. To whom this judgment of discerning does appertain; whether to Christians in general, or to some particular person or persons, authorised by God to judge for the rest of mankind, by whose judgment all men are concluded and bound up? And this is an inquiry of no small importance; because it is one of the most fundamental points in difference between us and the church of Rome. And however, in many particular controversies, as concerning transubstantiation, the communion in one kind, the service of God in an unknown tongue, the business of indulgences, the invocation of saints, the worship of images, they are not able to offer any thing that is fit to move a reasonable and considerate man: yet in this controversy, concerning the judge of controversies, they are not destitute of some specious appearance of reason, which deserves to be weighed and considered. Therefore, that we may examine this matter to the bottom, I shall do these three things.

1. Lay down some cautions and limitations, whereby we may understand, how far the generality of Christians are allowed to judge in matters of religion.

2. I shall represent the grounds of this principle.

3. Endeavour to satisfy the main objection of our adversaries against it; and likewise to shew, that there is no such reason and necessity for an universal infallible judge as they pretend.

1. I shall lay down some cautions and limitations, by which we may understand, how far the generality of Christians are allowed to judge in matters of religion.

*1<sup>st</sup>,* Private persons are only to judge for themselves, and not to impose their judgment upon others, as if they had any authority over them. And this is reasonable; because if it were otherwise, a man would deprive others of that liberty which he assumes to himself, and which he can claim upon no other account, but because it belongs to others equally with himself.

2dly, This liberty of judging is not so to be understood, as to take away the necessity and use of guides and teachers in religion. Nor can this be denied to be a reasonable limitation; because the knowledge of revealed religion is not a thing born with us, nor ordinarily supernaturally infused into men; but is to be learned as other things are. And if it be to be learned, there must be some to teach and instruct others: and they that will learn, must be modest and humble; and in those things of which they are no competent judges, they must give credit to their teachers, and trust their skill. For instance: every unlearned man is to take it upon the credit of those who are skilful, that the scriptures are truly and faithfully translated; and for the understanding of obscure texts of scripture, and more difficult points in religion, he is to rely upon those whose proper business and employment it is to apply themselves to the understanding of these things. For in these cases every man is not capable of judging himself, and therefore he must necessarily trust others: and in all other things he ought to be modest; and unless it be in plain matters, which every man can judge of, he ought rather to distrust himself than his teacher.

And this respect may be given to a teacher, without either supposing him to be infallible, or making an absolute resignation of my judgment to him. A man may be a very able teacher, suppose of the mathematics, and fit to have the respect which is due to a teacher, though he be not infallible in those sciences: and because infallibility is not necessary to such a teacher, it is neither necessary nor convenient that I should absolutely resign up my judgment to him. For though I have reason to credit him, within the compass of his art, in things which I do not know; I am not therefore bound to believe him in things plainly contrary to what I and all mankind do certainly know. For example: if, upon pretence of his skill in arithmetic, which I am learning of him, he should tell me, that twice two do not make four, but five; though I believed him to be the best mathematician in the world, yet I cannot believe him in this thing: nor is there reason I should; because I did not come to learn

learn this of him, but knew as much of that before, as he or any man else could tell me. The case is the same in matters of religion; in which there are some things so plain, and lie so level to all capacities, that every man is almost equally judge of them; as I shall have occasion farther to shew by and by.

*3dly*, Neither does this liberty of judging exempt men from a due submission and obedience to their teachers and governors. Every man is bound to obey the lawful commands of his governors; and what by public content and authority is determined and established, ought not to be gainsaid by private persons, but upon very clear evidence of the falshood or unlawfulness of it. And this is every man's duty, for the maintaining of order, and out of regard to the peace and unity of the church; which is not to be violated upon every scruple and frivolous pretence: and when men are perverse and disobedient, authority is judge, and may restrain and punish them.

*4thly*, Nor do I so far extend this liberty of judging in religion, as to think every man fit to dispute the controversies of religion. A great part of people are ignorant, and of so mean capacity, as not to be able to judge of the force of a very good argument, much less of the issue of a long dispute: and such persons ought not to engage in disputes of religion, but to beg God's direction, and to rely upon their teachers; and above all to live up to the plain dictates of natural light, and the clear commands of God's word; and this will be their best security. And if the providence of God hath placed them under such guides as do seduce them into error, their ignorance is invincible; and God will not condemn them for it, so long as they sincerely endeavour to do the will of God so far as they know it. And this being the case of many, especially in the church of Rome, where ignorance is so industriously cherished, I have so much charity as to hope well concerning many of them. And seeing that church teaches and enjoins the people to worship images, it is in some sense charitably done of them, not to let them know the second commandment, that they may not be guilty of sinning against so plain a law.

Having premised these cautions, I proceed, in the

2. Second place, to represent to you the grounds of

this principle of our religion, *viz.* That we allow private persons to judge for themselves in matters of religion.

*1st,* Because many things in religion, especially those which are most necessary to be believed and practised, are so plain, that every man of ordinary capacity, after competent instruction in matters of religion (which is always to be supposed) can as well judge of them for himself, as any man, or company of men in the world, can judge for him; because in these he hath a plain rule to go by, natural light, and clear revelation of scripture. And this is no new principle of the Protestants, but most expressly owned by the ancient fathers. "Whatever things are necessary are plain," saith St. Chrysostom. "All things are plainly contained in scripture, which concern faith and a good life," saith St. Austin. And nothing can be more reasonable, than that those things which are plain to every man, should be left to every man's judgment: for every man can judge of what is plain; of evident truth and falshood, virtue and vice, of doctrines and laws plainly delivered in scripture, if we believe any thing to be so, which is next to madness to deny. I will refer it to no man's judgment upon earth to determine for me, whether there be a God or not? Whether murder and perjury be sins? Whether it be not plain in scripture, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and he became man, and died for us, and rose again? So that there is no need of a judge in these cases. Nor can I possibly believe any man to be so absolutely infallible, as not to call his infallibility into question, if he determines any thing contrary to what is plain and evident to all mankind. For if he should determine that there is no God, or that he is not to be worshipped, or that he will not punish and reward men, or, which is the case that Bellarmine puts, that virtue is vice, and vice virtue; he would hereby take away the very foundation of religion: and how can I look upon him any longer as a judge in matters of religion, when there can be no such thing as religion, if he have judged and determined right?

*2dly,* The scripture plainly allows this liberty to particular and private persons to judge for themselves. And  
for

for this I need go no further than my text, which bids men *try the spirits whether they be of God*. I do not think this is spoken only to the pope, or a general council; but to Christians in general; for to these the Apostle writes. Now, if St. John had believed that God had constituted an infallible judge in his church, to whose sentence and determination all Christians are bound to submit, he ought in all reason to have referred Christians to him for the trial of spirits, and not have left it to every man's private judgment to examine and to determine these things. But it seems St. Paul was likewise of the same mind; and though he was guided by an infallible spirit, yet he did not expect that men should blindly submit to this doctrine: nay, so far is he from that, that he commends the Bereans for that very thing for which I dare say the church of Rome would have checked them most severely, namely, for *searching the scriptures, to see whether those things which the Apostles delivered were so or not*. This liberty St. Paul allowed; and though he was inspired by God, yet he treated those whom he taught like men. And indeed it were a hard case that a necessity of believing divine revelations, and rejecting impostures, should be imposed upon Christians; and yet the liberty of judging whether a doctrine be from God or not, should be taken away from them.

3dly, Our adversaries themselves are forced to grant that which in effect is as much as we contend for. For though they deny a liberty of judging in particular points of religion, yet they are forced to grant men a liberty of judging upon the whole. When they of the church of Rome would persuade a Jew or a Heathen to become a Christian; or a heretic, as they are pleased to call us, to come over to the communion of their church, and offer arguments to induce them thereunto; they do by this very thing, whether they will or no, make that man judge which is the true church, and the true religion: because it would be ridiculous to persuade a man to turn to their religion, and to urge him with reasons to do so; and yet to deny him the use of his own judgment, whether their reasons be sufficient to move him to make such a change. Now, as the Apostle reasons in another case,

if men be fit to judge for themselves in so great and important a matter as the choice of their religion, why should they be thought unworthy to judge in lesser matters? They tell us indeed, that a man may use his judgment in the choice of his religion; but when he hath once chosen, he is then for ever to resign up his judgment to their church. But what tolerable reason can any man give, why a man should be fit to judge upon the whole, and yet unfit to judge upon particular points; especially if it be considered, that no man can make a discreet judgment of any religion, before he hath examined the particular doctrines of it, and made a judgment concerning them? Is it credible, that God should give a man judgment in the most fundamental and important matter of all, *viz.* to discern the true religion, and the true church, from the false, for no other end, but to enable him to chuse once for all to whom he should resign and inflave his judgment for ever? which is just as reasonable as if one should say, that God hath given a man eyes for no other end, but to look out once for all, and to pitch upon a discreet person to lead him about blindfold all the days of his life. I come now to the

3. Third thing I propounded, which is, to answer the main objection of our adversaries against this principle: and likewise to shew that there is no such reason and necessity for an universal infallible judge as they pretend. Now, their great objection is this: If every man may judge for himself, there will be nothing but confusion in religion, there will be no end of controversies; so that an universal infallible judge is necessary, and without this God had not made sufficient provision for the assurance of mens faith, and for the peace and unity of his church: or, as it is expressed in the Canon law, *Aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*: "Otherwise our Lord had not seemed to be discreet." How plausible soever this objection may appear, I do not despair, but if men will lay aside prejudice, and impartially consider things, to make it abundantly evident, that this ground is not sufficient to found an infallible judge upon. And therefore, in answer to it, I desire these following particulars may be considered.

*1st,* That this which they say, rather proves what  
 God

God should have done according to their fancy, than what he hath really and actually done. My text expressly bids Christians to *try the spirits*; which to any man's sense does imply, that they may judge of these matters: but the church of Rome says they may not; because, if this liberty were permitted, God had not ordered things wisely, and for the best, for the peace and unity of his church. But as the Apostle says in another case, *What art thou, O man, that objectest against God?*

2dly, If this reasoning be good, we may as well conclude, that there is an universal infallible judge set over the whole world in all temporal matters, to whose authority all mankind is bound to submit; because this is as necessary to the peace of the world, as the other is to the peace of the church. And men surely are every whit as apt to be obstinate and perverse about matters of temporal right, as about matters of faith. But it is evident in fact and experience, that there is no such universal judge appointed by God over the whole world, to decide all cases of temporal right; and for want of him the world is fain to shift as well as it can. But now a very acute and scholastical man, that would argue that God must needs have done whatever he fancies convenient for the world should be done, might by the very same way of reasoning conclude the necessity of an universal infallible judge in civil matters, as well as in matters of religion: and their *Aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*: "Otherwise God had not seemed to be discreet," is every whit as cogent and as civil in the one case as the other.

3dly, There is no need of such a judge, to assure men in matters of religion; because men may be sufficiently certain without him. I hope it may be certain and clear enough, that there is a God, and that his providence governs the world, and that there is another life after this, though neither Pope nor council had ever declared any thing about these matters. And for revealed doctrines, we may be certain enough of all that is necessary, if it be true, which the fathers tell us, "That all things necessary are plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures."

4thly, An infallible judge, if there were one, is no certain way to end controversies, and to preserve the



unity of the church; unless it were likewise infallibly certain, that there is such a judge, and who he is. For till men were sure of both these, there would still be a controversy, whether there be an infallible judge, and who he is? And if it be true, which they tell us, That without an infallible judge, controversies cannot be ended; then a controversy concerning an infallible judge can never be ended. And there are two controversies actually on foot about an infallible judge; one, Whether there be an infallible judge or not? which is a controversy between us and the church of Rome: and the other, Who this infallible judge is, which is a controversy among themselves, which could never yet be decided: and yet, till it be decided, infallibility, if they had it, would be of no use to them for the ending of controversies.

5thly, There is no such absolute need as is pretended, of determining all controversies in religion. If men would divest themselves of prejudice and interest, as they ought, in matters of religion, the necessary things of religion are plain enough, and men would generally agree well enough about them: but if men will suffer themselves to be biassed by these, they would not hearken to an infallible judge, if there were one; or they would find out some way or other to call his infallibility into question. And as for doubtful and lesser matters in religion, charity and mutual forbearance among Christians would make the church as peaceable and happy as perhaps it was ever designed to be in this world, without absolute unity in opinion.

6thly, And lastly, Whatever may be the inconveniencies of mens judging for themselves in religion; yet taking this principle with the cautions I have given, I doubt not to make it appear, that the inconveniencies are far the least on that side. The present condition of human nature doth not admit of any constitution of things, whether in religion or civil matters, which is free from all kind of exception and inconvenience. That is the best state of things which is liable to the least and fewest. If men be modest, and humble, and willing to learn, God hath done that which is sufficient for the assurance of our faith, and for the peace of his church, without an infallible

lible judge; and if men will not be so, I cannot tell what would be sufficient. I am sure there were heresies and schisms in the Apostles times, when those who governed the church were certainly guided by an infallible Spirit. God hath appointed guides and teachers for us in matters of religion; and if we will be contented to be instructed by them in those necessary articles and duties of religion which are plainly contained in scripture, and to be counselled and directed by them in things that are more doubtful and difficult, I do not see why we might not do well enough without any infallible judge or guide.

But still it will be said, Who shall judge what things are plain, and what doubtful? The answer to this, in my opinion, is not difficult. For if there be any thing plain in religion, every man that hath been duly instructed in the principles of religion can judge of it, or else it is not plain. But there are some things in religion so very plain, that no guide or judge can in reason claim that authority over men, as to oblige them to believe or do the contrary; no, though he pretend to infallibility; no, though he were an Apostle, though he were an angel from heaven. St. Paul puts the case so high, Gal. i. 8. *Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than what you have received, let him be accursed:* which plainly supposeth, that Christians may and can judge when doctrines are contrary to the gospel. What! not believe an Apostle, nor *an angel from heaven*, if he should teach any thing evidently contrary to the plain doctrine of the gospel? if he should determine virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue? No: not an Apostle, nor an angel; because such a doctrine as this would confound and overturn all things in religion. And yet Bellarmine puts this very case, and says, "If the Pope should so determine, we were bound to believe him, unless we would sin against conscience."

I will conclude this discourse, by putting a very plain and familiar case; by which it will appear what credit and authority is fit to be given to a guide, and what not. Suppose I came a stranger into England, and, landing at Dover, took a guide there to conduct me in my way to York, which I knew before by the map to lie North of Dover. Having committed myself to him, if he lead me

for two or three days together out of any plain road, and many times over hedge and ditch, I cannot but think it strange, that, in a civil and well inhabited country, there should be no highways from one part of it to another; yet thus far I submit to him, though not without some regret and impatience. But then, if after this, for two or three days more, he lead me directly South, and with my face full upon the sun at noon-day, and at last bring me back again to Dover pier, and still bids me follow him; then certainly no modesty does oblige a man not to dispute with his guide; and to tell him, surely that can be no way, because it is sea. Now, though he set never so bold a face upon the matter, and tell me with all the gravity and authority in the world, that it is not the sea, but dry land, under the species and appearance of water; and that, whatever my eyes tell me, having once committed myself to his guidance, I must not trust my own senses in the case, it being one of the most dangerous sorts of infidelity for a man to believe his own eyes, rather than his faithful and infallible guide: all this moves me not; but I begin to expostulate roundly with him, and to let him understand, that, if I must not believe what I see, he is like to be of no farther use to me; because I shall not be able, at this rate, to know whether I have a guide, and whether I follow him or not. In short, I tell him plainly, that, when I took him for my guide, I did not take him to tell me the difference between North and South, between a hedge and a highway, between sea and dry land; all this I knew before, as well as he or any man else could tell me: but I took him to conduct and direct me the nearest way to York. And therefore, after all his impertinent talk, after all his motives of credibility to persuade me to believe him, and all his confident sayings, which he gravely calls demonstrations, I stand stiffly upon the shore, and leave my learned and reverend guide to take his own course, and to dispose of himself as he pleaseth; but firmly resolved not to follow him. And is any man to be blamed that breaks with his guide upon these terms?

And this is truly the case, when a man commits himself to the guidance of any person or church. If, by virtue of this authority, they will needs persuade me out of  
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my senses, and not to believe what I see, but what they say; that virtue is vice, and vice virtue, if they declare them to be so; and that, because they say they are infallible, I am to receive all their dictates for oracles, though never so evidently false, and absurd in the judgment of all mankind: in this case, there is no way to be rid of these unreasonable people, but to desire of them, since one kindness deserves another, and all contradictions are alike easy to be believed, that they would be pleased to believe that infidelity is faith; and that, when I absolutely renounce their authority, I do yield a most perfect submission and obedience to it.

Upon the whole matter, all the revelations of God, as well as the laws of men, go upon this presumption, that men are not stark fools, but that they will consider their interest, and have some regard to the great concernment of their eternal salvation. And this is as much to secure men from mistake in matters of belief, as God hath afforded to keep men from sin in matters of practice. He hath made no effectual and infallible provision, that men shall not sin; and yet it would puzzle any man to give a good reason, why God should take more care to secure men against errors in belief, than against sin and wickedness in their lives.

I shall now only draw three or four inferences from this discourse which I have made, and so conclude.

1. That it is every man's duty who hath ability and capacity for it, to endeavour to understand the grounds of his religion. For to try doctrines, is to inquire into the grounds and reasons of them; which the better any man understands, the more firmly he will be established in the truth, and be the more resolute in the day of trial, and the better able to withstand the arts and assaults of cunning adversaries, and the fierce storms of persecution. And, on the contrary, that man will soon be moved from his steadfastness, who never examined the grounds and reasons of his belief. When it comes to the trial, he that hath but little to say for his religion, will probably neither do nor suffer much for it.

2. That all doctrines are vehemently to be suspected which decline trial, and are so loth to be brought into the light; which will not endure a fair examination, but magisterially

gisterially require an implicit faith: whereas truth is bold, and full of courage, and loves to appear openly; and is so secure and confident of her own strength, as to offer herself to the severest trial and examination. But to deny all liberty of inquiry and judgment in matters of religion, is the greatest injury and disparagement to truth that can be; and a tacit acknowledgment, that she lies under some disadvantage, and that there is less to be said for her than for error.

I have often wondered why the people in the church of Rome do not suspect their teachers and guides to have some ill design upon them, when they do so industriously debar them of the means of knowledge, and are so very loth to let them understand what it is that we have to say against their religion. For can any thing in the world be more suspicious, than to persuade men to put out their eyes, upon promise that they will help them to a much better and more faithful guide? If any church, any profession of men, be unwilling their doctrines should be expoied to trial, it is a certain sign they know something by them that is faulty, and which will not endure the light. This is the account which our Saviour gives us in a like case. *It was because mens deeds were evil, that they loved darkness rather than light: for every one that doth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd: but he that doth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

3. Since reason and Christianity allow this liberty to private persons, to judge for themselves in matters of religion, we should use this privilege with much modesty and humility, with great submission and deference to our spiritual rulers and guides, whom God hath appointed in his church. And there is very great need of this caution; since, by experience, we find this liberty so much abused by many, to the nourishing of pride and self-conceit, of division and faction; and those who are least able to judge, to be frequently the most forward and confident, the most peremptory and perverse; and, instead of demeaning themselves with the submission of learners, to assume to themselves the authority of judges, even in the most doubtful and disputable matters.

The tyranny of the Roman church over the minds and consciences of men is not to be justified upon any account: but nothing puts so plausible a colour upon it, as the ill use that is too frequently made of this natural privilege, of mens judging for themselves in a matter of so infinite concernment, as that of their eternal happiness. But then it is to be considered, that the proper remedy in this case, is not to deprive men of this privilege, but to use the best means to prevent the abuse of it: for though the inconveniencies arising from the ill use of it may be very great, yet the mischief on the other hand is intolerable. Religion itself is liable to be abused to very bad purposes, and frequently is so; but it is not therefore best that there should be no religion: and yet this objection, if it be of any force, and be pursued home, is every whit as strong against religion itself, as against mens liberty of judging in matters of religion. Nay, I add farther, that no man can judiciously embrace the true religion, unless he be permitted to judge whether that which he embraces be the true religion or not.

4. When, upon due trial and examination, we are well settled and established in our religion, *let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and not be like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, through the slight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive.* And, above all, let us resolve to live according to the excellent rules and precepts of our holy religion; let us heartily obey that doctrine which we profess to believe. We who enjoy the Protestant religion, have all the means and advantages of understanding the will of God, free liberty, and full scope of inquiring into it, and informing ourselves concerning it. We have all the opportunities we can wish of coming to the knowledge of our duty. The oracles of God lie open to us, and his law is continually before our eyes: *His word is nigh unto us, in our mouths, and in our hearts,* (that is, we may read it and meditate upon it) *that we may do it.* *The key of knowledge is put into our hands; so that, if we do not enter into the kingdom of heaven, it is we ourselves that shut ourselves out.* And where there is nothing to hinder us from the knowledge of our duty, there certainly nothing

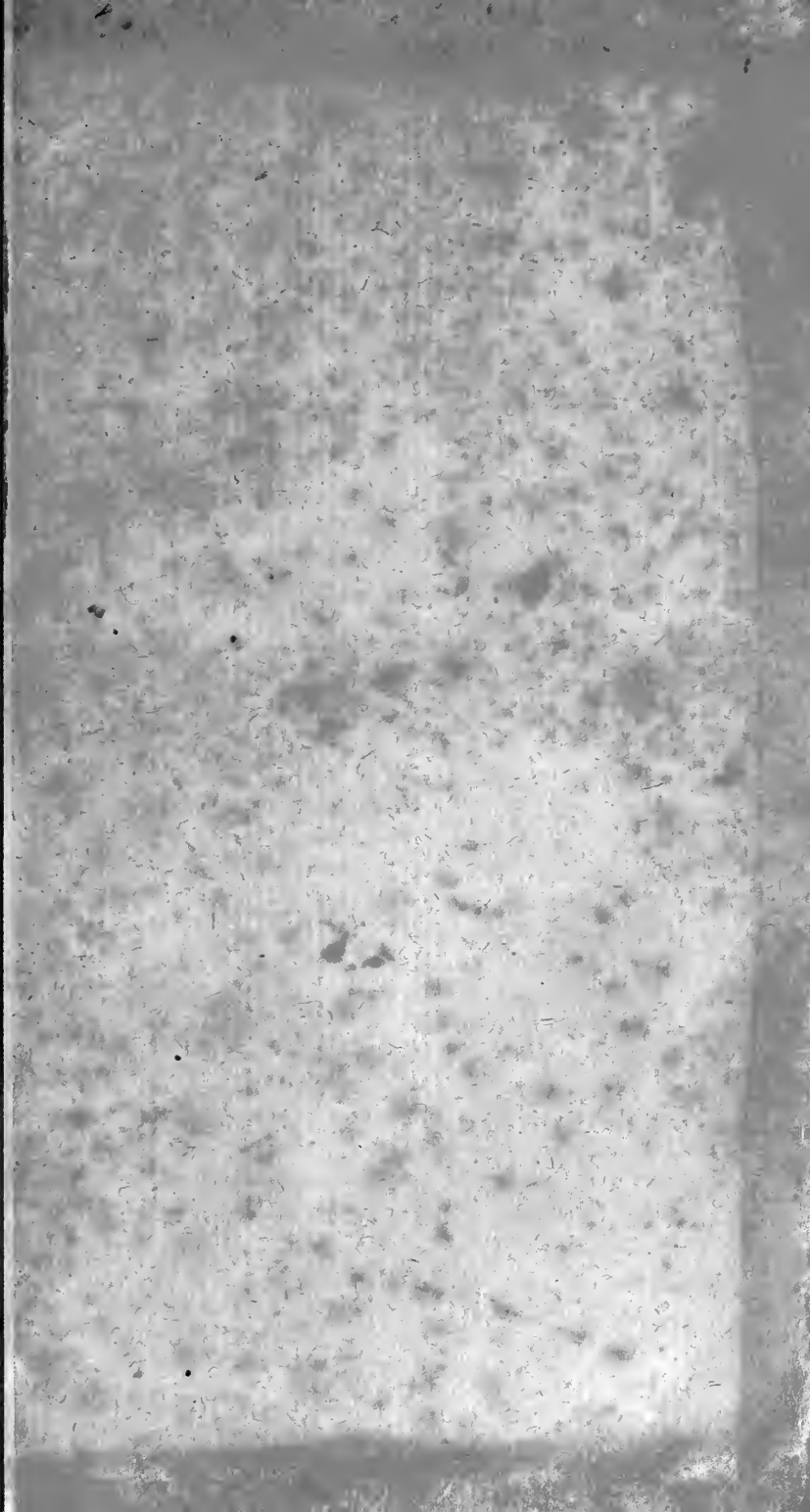
can excuse us from the practice of it: for the end of all knowledge is, to direct men in their duty, and effectually to engage them to the performance of it. The great business of religion is, to make men truly good, and to teach them to live well. And, if religion have not this effect, it matters not of what church any man lists and enters himself; for, most certainly, a bad man can be saved in none. Though a man know the right way to heaven never so well, and be entered into it; yet if he will not walk therein, he shall never come thither: nay, it will be an aggravation of this man's unhappiness, that he was lost in the way to heaven, and perished in the very road to salvation. But if we will in good earnest apply ourselves to the practice of religion, and the obedience of God's holy laws, his grace will never be wanting to us to so good a purpose.

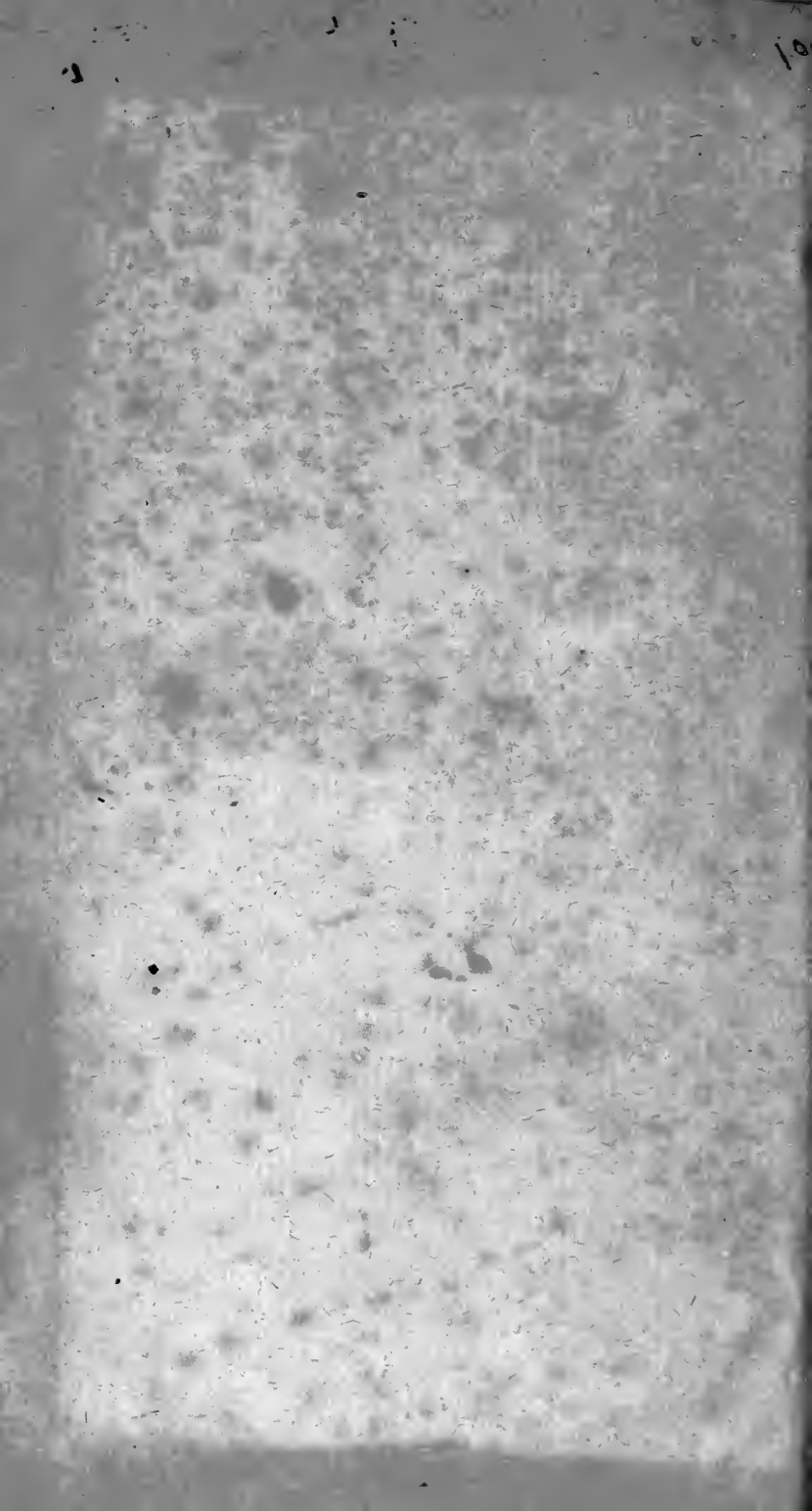
I have not time to recommend religion to you at large, with all its advantages. I will comprise what I have to say in a few words; and mind them at your peril. Let that which is our great concernment be our great care, *to know the truth, and to do it; to fear God, and keep his commandments.* Considering the reasonableness and the reward of piety and virtue, nothing can be wiser. Considering the mighty assistance of God's grace, which he is ready to afford us, and the unspeakable satisfaction and delight which is to be had in the doing of our duty, nothing can be easier: nothing will give us that pleasure while we live: nothing can minister that true and solid comfort to us when we come to die. There is probably no such way for a man to be happy in this world; to be sure, there is no way but this to escape the intolerable and endless miseries of another world.

Now, God grant that we may all *know and do, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace,* for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ: To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*The end of the First Volume.*







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